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April 1928.

MY SERMON-NOTES

A SELECTION FROM

OUTLINES OF DISCOURSES

DELIVERED AT

THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE

WITH ANECDOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

BY

C. H. SPURGEON.

FROM ECCLESIASTES TO MALACHI—LXV. TO CXXIX.

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PREFACE.

THE speedy sale of the first part of "My Sermon Notes" has constrained me to issue a second portion without delay. These outlines have evidently been appreciated, or they would not have been so largely purchased in so short a time. I hardly hoped to meet with so much encouragement, but I must attribute it to the need of those whom I have endeavored to serve, and to the favorable notices which have been kindly given by the public press with an almost unbroken unanimity.

The fact is that in these hurried times many who desire to speak to edification are hard pressed by the incessant activities of Christian life, and become so jaded and worn that a hint from a brother is absolutely necessary to set them upon a train of thought. He whose ministry is most original will be the first to confess his obligation to his books. He waits upon God for a subject, and as often as not he finds it while reading; neither does he hesitate to say that the Lord his God brought it to him because it came by the instrumentality of another man's writings. If it be so with the more fruitful, the less fertile minds among us are certainly all

the more in need of aid; though it is very possible that they will be more slow in owning it, and more shy in accepting it. They do well to use their own powers, but they will do none the worse if they will condescend to receive suggestions from others.

These outlines were not written to be used as they are. True, they may be filled up with choice original matter, and employed as frameworks in their present form; but more probably they will be taken to pieces and built up in another shape, or they will be cut in halves, or portions of them will be united with other materials. I hope to lend a handful of chips and shavings, or, if you will, a bundle of firewood, to a brother, with which he may kindle a fire on his own hearth, and prepare food for his people. Possibly a lazy brother may boil his own pot with my sticks, but even that I shall not deplore so long as the food is well cooked. Should I be so unfortunate as to be a helper to the utterly idle man, by tempting him to gather no fuel of his own, I shall not even then view the matter with despair, for perhaps the idler may burn his fingers in the operation; and I shall fall back upon the consideration that he would have taken wood from some other pile if he had not met with mine. A man will do no great harm with my fagots if he will use holy fire: the truths which are contained in these Notes will injure no man if they be honestly allowed to speak for themselves.

If life and health be spared, I shall proceed with the

New Testament in two volumes of the same size as that which is now in the reader's hand, or one volume in the large form; and I trust each portion will be as favorably received as the first. When the writer sleeps with his fathers, it may be that other voices will, by these outlines, be helped to preach the gospel of the ages, and so to glorify the grace of our Lord Jesus. May the Holy Spirit breathe upon these dry bones, and make them live! May he fill each preacher's heart with suitable emotions, and give to his mouth forcible expressions, and may the name of Jesus be thus made known to many of the Lord's redeemed!

So prays the humble servant of Christ, and of his Church.

C. H. SPURGEON.

WESTWOOD, *May*, 1885.

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MY SERMON NOTES.

LXV.

"WHERE THE WORD OF A KING IS, THERE IS POWER."
Ecclesiastes viii. 4.

KINGS were autocratic in Solomon's day. We may be glad that we are not under bondage to an absolute monarch, but enjoy the blessings of constitutional government. We are by no means slow to say to any one of our governors, "What doest thou?" And such a question, wisely put, is good both for him and for us.

God alone is rightfully sovereign without limit. He is King in the most absolute sense; and so it should be; for he is supremely good, wise, just, holy, &c.

As he is Maker of all, dominion over his creatures is a matter of natural right.

He has infinite power wherewith to carry out his royal will.

Even in his least word there is omnipotence.

Let us consider this,—

I. TO EXCITE OUR AWE.

Let us carefully think of—

1. His creating word, by which all things arose out of nothing.
2. His preserving word, by which all things abide.
3. His destroying word, by which he will shake earth and heaven.
4. His word of prerogative by which he kills and makes alive.
5. His word of everlasting promise, which is our comfort.
6. His word of terrible threatening, which is our warning.
7. His word of prophecy and fore-ordination, which is a great deep, full of solemn teaching to the lowly in heart.

Who can stand before any of these without trembling adoration? Power attends them to the fullest degree, for each one is the word of a King.

II. TO ENSURE OUR OBEDIENCE.

1. No divine command is to be treated as non essential, for it is the word of Jehovah, the King. (See verses 2 and 3.)
2. Each precept is to be obeyed at once, heartily, to the full, by every one, since the King commands.
3. His service must not be shunned, for that were to rebel against our Sovereign. Jonah did not find this succeed: for the Lord will not

be trifled with, and will make runaways know that his arm is long.

4. Disobedience is to be repented of. If we have fallen into sin, let the King's word have a gracious power to subdue us to hearty grief.

III. To inspire our confidence.

1. That he is able to give to the penitent, pardon; for he has promised in his word to do so.
2. That he will give to the believing, power to renew their lives. "He sent his word, and healed them," is true, spiritually.
3. That he will give to the tempted, power to overcome temptation. God ensures the believer's victory over every assault of Satan through the word. This weapon Jesus used in the wilderness.
4. That he will give to the suffering, power to endure with patience, and to gather profit from the trial.
5. That he will give to the dying, hope, peace, beatific vision, &c. One word from the Lord of life robs death of its sting.

IV. To direct our Christian effort.

1. In all we do we should respect the King's word. Churches should own Christ's headship, obey his laws, and acknowledge no other law-

giver. This would be a source of power, as the opposite is the cause of weakness.

2. We must look nowhere else for power. Education, oratory, music, wealth, ceremonialism, are weakness itself, if depended on.

3. We must rely upon the word of our King as the instrument of power whenever we seek to do works in his name.

Preach it: for nothing else will break hard hearts, comfort the despairing, beget faith, or produce holiness.

Plead it in prayer: for the Lord will surely keep his own promises, and put forth his power to make them good.

Receive it into our mind and heart: for where divine truth is treasured, there will be a wealth of spiritual power.

Practise it: for none can gainsay a life which is ordered according to the precepts of the Lord. An obedient life is full of a power before which men and devils do homage.

4. We shall see its power in various ways.

Gathering congregations. After all, the many do not go to listen to mere human teachings, but the cross attracts everywhere.

Gaining true converts. No conversion is worth anything unless it is wrought by the word of truth.

Keeping such converts to the end. The incorruptible seed alone produces an incorruptible life.

Order is created and preserved in the church by God's word.

Saints are instructed, edified, sanctified, and fed by the word.

Love, joy, peace, and every grace, are begotten and fostered by the word.

Read much the royal word.

Speak more than ever the King's word, which is the gospel of peace.

Believe in the word of King Jesus, and be bold to defend it.

Bow before it, and be patient and happy.

Experiences.

No language ever stirs the deeps of my nature like the Word of God; and none produces such a profound calm within my spirit. As no other voice can, it melts me to tears, it humbles me in the dust, it fires me with enthusiasm, it fills me with felicity, it elevates me to holiness. Every faculty of my being owns the power of the sacred Word: it sweetens my memory, it brightens my hope, it stimulates my imagination, it directs my judgment, it commands my will, and it cheers my heart. The word of man charms me for the time; but I outlive and outgrow its power; it is altogether the reverse with the Word of the King of kings: it rules me more sovereignly, more practically, more habitually, more completely every day. Its power is for all

seasons: for sickness and for health, for solitude and for company, for personal emergencies and for public assemblies. I had sooner have the word of God at my back than all the armies and navies of all the great powers; ay, than all the forces of nature; for the Word of the Lord is the source of all the power in the universe, and within it there is an infinite supply in reserve.

Believers know the life-giving power of the Word, for they can say, "Thy word hath quickened me;" and its life-sustaining power, for they live "by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"; and its power against sin, for they can say, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee."

"His word was with power" in Capernaum of old, and it will be with the same power in any place nowadays. His word cannot fail; "it shall not return void; it *shall* prosper." Therefore, when our "words fall to the ground," it only proves that they were not his words.—*Miss Havergal.*

LXVI.

"I AM THE ROSE OF SHARON, AND THE LILY OF THE VALLEYS."—*Song of Solomon* ii. 1.

HERE we have the Bridegroom praising himself, and this is a thing to be considered with careful attention.

This self-praise is not tainted with pride: such a fault could not find a place in the lowly Jesus. His ego-ism is not egotism. He does not commend himself for his own sake, but for our sakes. He sets himself forth in glowing terms because:—

In condescension he desires our love. What a poor thing it is for him to care about! Yet he thirsts after it.

In wisdom he uses the best way to win our love.

In tenderness he deigns to describe himself that we may be encouraged by his familiarity in praising himself to us. This is one of the most effectual proofs of lowliness.

Of necessity he describes himself, for who else can describe him? "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father:" Matt. xi. 27.

Moreover, he states a fact which else might not be believed, seeing he makes himself so common a flower of earth, so graciously a joy for men, that all may have him.

We will not take up your time by trying to discover what flowers these may have been in the eastern flora: we may select those most like them in our own western land, and do our Lord no wrong.

I. THE EXCEEDING DELIGHTFULNESS OF OUR LORD.

He compares himself, not only, as in other places, to needful bread, and refreshing water, but to lovely flowers. In Jesus there are all delights as well as all necessaries.

1. He is now all that he ever was, for his "I am" runs through all eternity in unabated force.
2. He is in himself the delight of men. He speaks not of offices, gifts, works, possessions, but of himself. "I am."
3. He is delightful to the eye of faith, even as flowers are to the bodily sight. What more beautiful than roses and lilies?
4. He is delightful in the savor which comes of him. In him is a delicious, varied, abiding fragrance.
5. In all this he is the choicest of the choice: the rose—yea, Sharon's rose: the lily—yea, the most delicious lily of the valleys. There is none like him. He is indeed "a plant of renown."

Yet blind men see no color, and men without scent perceive no odor in the sweetest flowers; and carnal men see no delights in Jesus. Roses and

lilies require eyes and light ere they can be appreciated, and to know Jesus we must have grace and gracious dispositions. He says, "I am the Rose of Sharon;" and so he is essentially; but the grave question is,—"Is he this to you?" Yes, or no.

II. THE SWEET VARIETY OF HIS DELIGHTFULNESS.

1. Of the rose, majesty: of the lily, love.
2. Of the rose, suffering: of the lily, purity.
3. Of both, a great variety: all the roses and all the lilies, all the beauties of heaven and earth meet in Jesus.
4. Of both the very essence. Of all the creatures, all the excellences, virtues, and blessings, which may be found in them, come from Jesus, and abide in Jesus without limit. Many eyes are wanted to spy out the whole of Christ. No eye, nor all eyes, can see all that lies in his varied perfections.
5. Of all these a perfect proportion, so that no one excellence destroys another. He is all a rose should be, and yet not the less perfect as a lily.

Hence, he is suitable to all saints, the joy of all, the perfection of beauty to each one.

III. THE EXCEEDING FREENESS OF HIS DELIGHTFULNESS.

1. Meant to be plucked and enjoyed as roses and lilies are.

2. Abundant as a common flower. He is not as a rare orchid, but as the anemones which covered Sharon's plains, and as the lilies which abounded in all the valleys of Palestine.

3. Abiding in a common place, as roses in Sharon and lilies in the valleys, where every passer-by was free to gather according to his own sweet will. Not found on inaccessible steeps, or within guarded enclosures, Jesus is out in the open: a flower of the common. This is a leading idea of the text. Those who desire Christ may have him.

4. Scattering fragrance, not over a room or a house, but far and wide, perfuming every wandering wind.

5. Yet roses and lilies fail to set forth our Beloved, for his is unfading virtue. They are soon withered, but "He dieth no more."

In all things look for Jesus. See him in primroses and daisies.

In Jesus look for all things of beauty and sweetness: lilies and roses are in him.

Listen much to Jesus, for he can tell you most about himself; and, coming at first hand, it will be surely true, and come with great force and unction. Hearken, and hear him say, "I am the Rose of Sharon."

Observations.

'*I am the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the Valleys;*" words most seemly in the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom it is not robbery from others, but condescension and grace, to commend himself to the sons of men. "I am meek and lowly," would be the utterance of pride in Gabriel, but it is humility in Jesus, who has stooped that he might become meek and lowly. "I am the true Vine," "I am the good Shepherd," etc., are the expressions alike of truth and grace, and so here.—*A. Moody Stuart.*

Not to flowers which only the rich and great can possess, but to those easily obtainable, does he liken himself; for always did he stoop to the lowliest, and the common people ever heard him gladly. His presence on earth never failed to bring comfort to the needy, and refreshment to the downcast spirit, just as sweet odors float around roses and lilies, and minister solace to the organ of smell, while their fair forms and rich and delicate colors gratify the eye.—*H. K. Wood, in "The Heavenly Bridegroom and his Bride."*

We believe there can be little doubt that the rose is really intended by the Hebrew word. Even if in the general sense it should mean but a *flower*, we should still infer that, when applied in a particular sense, it means a rose, for this would be according to the usage of the East. Thus the Persian word *gul* describes a flower in general, and the rose *par excel-*

lence. This suffices to show the estimation in which the rose is held in the East. In the Persian language particularly, there is perhaps no poem in which allusions to it, and comparisons drawn from it, do not recur even to repletion. . . . The extreme fragrance and beauty of the rose in some parts of Western Asia have attracted the notice of many travellers. It is also cultivated, not merely as a garden plant for pleasure, but in extensive fields, from the produce of which is prepared that valued and delicious perfume called rose-water. The size of the rose-trees, and the number of the flowers on each, far exceed in the rose districts of Persia, anything we are here accustomed to witness.—*Pictorial Bible.*

LXVII.

"IT WAS BUT A LITTLE THAT I PASSED FROM THEM, BUT I FOUND HIM WHOM MY SOUL LOVETH: I HELD HIM, AND WOULD NOT LET HIM GO, UNTIL I HAD BROUGHT HIM INTO MY MOTHER'S HOUSE, AND INTO THE CHAMBER OF HER THAT CONCEIVED ME."—*Song of Solomon*, iii. 4.

THE first position is, "*I passed from them.*" We must go beyond the fellowship of the best of men, and commune with him whom our soul loveth. Our love must lead to action, "*I sought him.*" Those who love Jesus seek his presence with an agony of desire.

After this seeking, we read at first, "*I found him not.*" Sad, but needful disappointment. But this lasts not for ever; we soon come into the region of our text, where everything is bright with sunlight. Three flashes of delight follow each other: "*I found him;*" "*I held him;*" "*I brought him.*" May these be our joyous experience! To that end let us muse upon them, and pray the Holy Spirit to help us.

I. "I FOUND HIM": or, love in fellowship.

1. I was enquiring for him.
2. I had got beyond all men and means, and could not be content with any but himself.

3. I beheld his person. He drew near in his Word and ordinances. I perceived him by the Spirit. Faith saw him clearly.
4. I was assured of his presence. My heart felt peculiar influences operating upon it. It was a time of love.
5. I knew him to be mine. There were no doubts and fears. He was "my Beloved," and I was all his own.
6. I was filled with content. I looked for no one else, for in finding him I had found my all for earth and heaven.

Do we know what this blessed finding means?

If not, let us never rest till we do.

II. "I HELD HIM:" or, love in possession.

1. By my heart's resolve, determining never to lose him again.
2. By my tearful pleas, entreating him not to make me wretched by withdrawing. I pleaded—
   - My joy in his society.
   - My need of his gracious protection.
   - My love to him, which made me hunger for him.
   - His love to me, which surely would not let him leave me.
3. By making him my all in all. He stays where he is prized, and I set him on a high throne in my spirit.

4. By renouncing all other loves, sins, idols, &c. He is jealous, and I kept myself altogether for him.
5. By a simple faith: for he is pleased with trust; and dwells where he is rested in.
6. By his own power. "I would not let him go," because I held him by his promise, and by the power which it gave me.

If you have Jesus, hold him.

He is willing to be constrained. See how often, in his life on earth, "they constrained him," and he yielded to their will.

III. "I BROUGHT HIM:" or, love in communication.

The love of Jesus creates in our hearts love to our fellow-believers for their Redeemer's sake.

The church of God is our mother: the holy assembly is her chamber, where we were born unto God, and nurtured in his fear. We are to labor to promote communion with Christ among those who are our brethren, taking Jesus with us whensoever we go up to the gatherings of the faithful.

This we should do—

1. By our own spirit: communing with Jesus before we go to public worship, and going there with him in our company.

   We shall always find him in the church if we take him in our hearts to its hallowed services.
2. By our words: we should so speak as to set forth Jesus, and promote fellowship with

him. Alas, how many speak controversially, or without savor, or with carnal oratory wherein is no room for the Beloved! Oh, for a crucified style of speech!

8. By our prayers we should bring him into the assembly; ay, bring him into society where hitherto he has been unknown. The world also was once our mother. Oh, that we could introduce the Lord Jesus into her chambers, that he might reign and rule there! "Thy Kingdom come." By loving violence we will constrain him to come with us in his presence and power.

See what the church needs!—Christ in her midst.
See how he is likely to come!—he must be brought.
See what must first be done!—he must be held.
See who alone can do this!—those who have found him.
Yet see, also, who may find him!—all who love him, and seek him.
Are we among the number?

Further Suggestions.

Hold him by not offending him. First, by sloth. When the soul turns sleepy or careless, Christ goes away. Secondly, by idols. You cannot hold two objects. Thirdly, by being unwilling to be sanctified. Fourthly, by an unholy house. "I brought him into my mother's house." Remember to take Christ home

with you, and let him rule in your house. If you walk with Christ abroad but never take him home, you will soon part company for ever.—*McCheyne.*

"*I found him;*" I, a man, found the Lord of Glory; I, a slave to sin, found the great Deliverer; I, the child of darkness, found the Light of life; I, the uttermost of the lost, found my Saviour and my God; I, widowed and desolate, found my Friend, my Beloved, my Husband. Go and do likewise, sons and daughters of Zion, and he will be found of you; for "then shall ye find when ye search with all your heart."

But we have another mother, and other brethren, in the human family from which we are sprung. The Church has the first, not the only claim on our affections; the perishing world has its right to a large share of our pity and our prayers. Comparatively, it is not hard for us to bring Jesus into the Church, which is his mother's house as well as ours. But the world hates Christ, has nothing in common with him, is aware that he rightfully claims the dominion, is sensitively jealous of the claim, and lives with its doors barred against him night and day. No criminal keeps so vigilant a watch against the officers of justice, no lonely widow makes her gates so fast against the midnight robber, no miser spurns so haughtily the beggar from his door, as the unrenewed heart keeps watch and ward against the entrance of Jesus, and scornfully sends him away when he asks for a lodging in the soul. To intro-

duce him, therefore, into this home of our mother is a work demanding effort, watchfulness, patience. There is much to provoke him to turn away; we must plead with him, hold him, and not let him go; and with our mother's children we must also plead with "the soft tongue that breaketh the bone," for they are offended with us as well as with him. So sought and prevailed the Bride of the Lamb, till she brought her own Beloved into the midst of her mother's children, by whom she had been herself so hardly entreated, requiting evil with good. Have you attempted this? Are you engaged in the effort now? If not, rise and commence such a work of faith and labor of love on behalf of the lost.—*A. Moody Stuart.*

LXVIII.

"TURN AWAY THINE EYES FROM ME, FOR THEY HAVE OVERCOME ME."—*Song of Solomon* vi. 5.

MUCH of our life's business consists in overcoming evil, but here we have to deal with overcoming him who is perfect good.

It is not to be supposed that there is any opposition in the heavenly Bridegroom, nor any unwillingness to be overcome by his bride: no, it is the loving heart of Jesus which is readily overcome by the love of his chosen one.

Let us learn from this most remarkable exclamation,—

I. THAT LOOKING UPON HIS CHURCH HAS OVERCOME THE HEART OF THE LORD JESUS.

1. He left heaven to be one with her. He could not bear to see her ruin, but left his Father that he might share her lot.
2. He died to redeem her: "found guilty of excess of love."
3. His delight is in her now; she is lovely in his sight.
4. His eternal joy is to spring from her: he will see in her the result of his death-agony: "he will rest in his love."

Jesus is so overcome that he still gives all that he is, and has, yea, and his own self, to his beloved.

II. THAT THE EYES OF HIS CHOSEN STILL OVERCOME THE LORD JESUS.

Because his eyes are full of love, therefore is he overcome by our eyes when we are—

1. Looking up in deep repentance.
   - At first seeking for pardon.
   - At times when we pine for restoration from backsliding.
   - Whenever we are struggling to maintain fellowship, and mourning our breaches of it.
   - Whenever we groan under inbred sin, and would be free from it.
2. Looking at him by faith for salvation.
   - At first, by a desperate act, daring to glance with feeble hope.
   - Afterwards, in simplicity, day by day gazing at his wounds.
   - In deep distress still hoping on, and never removing our eyes.
3. Looking for all things to his love alone.
   - When in sore trouble, patiently submitting.
   - When in humble hope, quietly waiting.
   - When under severe tests, firmly believing.
   - When in full assurance, joyfully expecting.
4. Looking in prayer.
   - In personal trouble, like Jacob, pleading the promise, and saying, "I will not let thee go." The Lord says, "Let me go."

In holy compassion pleading for others, like Moses, to whom the Lord said, "Let me alone."

5. Looking in rapturous, restful love.

He is altogether lovely, and all mine: my eyes swim with tears of delight as they gaze on him, and thus they overcome him.

My heart burns with love to him, and I adore him; and this wins everything from him.

6. Looking in sacred longing for his appearing.

Pining for a personal revelation of himself to me by his Spirit.

Most of all, sighing for his speedy coming in the glory of the Second Advent. He replies, "Behold, I come quickly!"

Oh, the power of a spiritual man with Jesus!

Oh, the power of a church with heaven! The Lord will deny nothing to the prayer of his elect.

III. THAT IF THE CHURCH WOULD BUT LOOK TO HER LORD MORE SHE WOULD OVERCOME THE WORLD MORE.

To overcome the Lord is the greater thing, and when this is done, the church may well go forth conquering and to conquer all that is less than her Lord. The eyes of the church should be set on Jesus, and then she would overcome. If we were—

1. Weeping for dishonor done to him, he would see this, and retrieve our defeat.

2. Depending on him for our strength, our faith would give us victory through Jesus' love.
3. Obediently following his commands, he would then feel it right to give honor to his own truth, and to reward obedience to his own precepts.
4. Confidently expectant of victory, Jesus would make bare his arm for us. Faith's eyes calmly watching, or flashing with exultant expectancy, would be as flames of fire to the foe.
5. Eagerly pleading for his interposition, our tearful, earnest eyes would soon succeed with our gracious God.

See the secret of strength. Look to Jesus, and overcome.

Let us lament our infrequent use of this conquering weapon.

Now for a long and loving look at the Bridegroom of our souls.

Help us, O Holy Spirit, to whom our eyes owe their sight!

Hints.

Who has not felt the power of the eye? The beggar looked so imploringly that we gave him alms; the child's eye so darkened with disappointment that we indulged his desire; the sick man gazed so sadly

at our departure that we turned back, and lengthened our visit. But the eyes of those we love master us. Does a tear begin to form? We yield at once. We cannot endure that the beloved eyes should weep. Our Lord uses this figure to most encouraging purpose. The weeping eyes of prayer move the loving heart of Jesus. Matthew Henry says, "Christ is pleased to borrow these expressions of a passionate lover to express the tenderness of a compassionate Redeemer, and the delight he takes in his redeemed, and in the workings of his own grace in them."

We read in Matthew xv. that the Lord Jesus said to the Canaanitish woman, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." He seems to surrender at discretion, conquered by that faith which he had himself put into her heart. Now, faith is the eye of the soul, and here is an instance of the eyes overcoming the Lord. We cannot vanquish him with the works of our hands, or the eloquence of our lips; but we can win the victory by the pleadings of our eyes,—those eyes, which are as the eyes of doves, seeing afar,—the eyes of true faith.

Some devout persons find it a profitable exercise to bow the knee, and to look up. Using few words, they commune through a long, upward, pleading glance. One only cried, "My God," and at another time, "God be merciful to me, a sinner;" and yet he came forth from his closet as one who had bathed in heaven.

"Have you a glimpse of Christ now that you are dying?" was the question asked of an old Scottish saint, who, raising himself, made the emphatic reply, "I'll hae none o' your glimpses now that I am dying, since that I have had a full look at Christ these forty years gane."—*Annals of the Early Friends.*

LXIX.

"COME NOW, AND LET US REASON TOGETHER, SAITH THE LORD: THOUGH YOUR SINS BE AS SCARLET, THEY SHALL BE AS WHITE AS SNOW; THOUGH THEY BE RED LIKE CRIMSON, THEY SHALL BE AS WOOL."—*Isaiah* i. 18.

THE sinful condition of men is terrible in the extreme. This is set forth vividly in previous verses of the chapter. They are altogether alienated from their God.

God himself interposes to produce a change. The proposal of peace is always from his side.

He urges that a conference be held at once, "Come, and let us reason together."

That conference is to be held at once: "Come *now*," for the danger is too great to admit of a moment's delay. God is urgent; let us not procrastinate.

In our text we have,—

I. AN INVITATION TO A CONFERENCE.

Sinful men do not care to think, consider, and look matters in the face; yet to this distasteful duty they are urged.

If they reason, they rather reason against God than together with him; but here the proposal is not

to discuss, but to treat with a view to reconciliation. This also ungodly hearts decline.

1. They prefer to attend to ceremonial observances. Outward performances are easier, and do not require thought.
2. Yet the matter is one which demands most serious discussion, and deserves it; for God, the soul, heaven, and hell are involved in it. Never was wise counsel more desirable.
3. No good can come of neglecting to consider it. It is one of those matters which will never drift the right way of itself.
4. It is most gracious on the Lord's part to suggest a conference. Kings do not often invite criminals to reason with them.
5. The invitation is a pledge that he desires peace, is willing to forgive, and anxious to set us right.
6. The appointment of the immediate present as the time for the reasoning together is a proof of generous wisdom. "Just as thou art," come to God in Christ, just as he is. Love invites thee in all thy sin and misery.

II. A SPECIMEN OF THE REASONING ON GOD'S PART.

1 The one main ground of difference is honestly mentioned,—"though your sins be as scarlet." God calls the most glaring sinners to come to him, knowing them to be such.

2 This ground of difference God himself will re-

move,—"they shall be as white as snow." He will forgive, and so end the quarrel.

3. He will remove the offence perfectly,—"as snow—as wool."
   He will remove forever the guilt of sin.
   He will discharge the penalty of sin.
   He will destroy the dominion of sin.
   He will prevent the return of sin.
4. He explains by his own Word how this is done.
   Free forgiveness obliterating guilt.
   Full atonement averting punishment.
   Regeneration by the Spirit breaking the power of sin.
   Constant sanctification forbidding its return.

See, then, the way of your return to God made easy. Consider it carefully, and talk with God about it at once.

III. THIS SPECIMEN REASONING IS AN ABSTRACT OF THE WHOLE ARGUMENT.

Each special objection is anticipated.

1. The singular greatness of your sins,—"red like crimson." This is met by a great atonement, which cleanses from all sin.
2. The long continuance of your sins. Cloth dyed scarlet has lain long in the dye-vat. The blood of Jesus cleanses at once.
3. The light against which your sins were committed. This puts a glaring color upon them. But "all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men."

4. The grieving of the Holy Spirit. Even this is removed by Jesus.
5. The failure of your attempts to whiten your soul. Crimson and scarlet cannot be removed by the art of man; but the Lord saith, "I have blotted out thy sins."
6. The despair which your sins create: they are so glaring that they are ever before you, yet they shall be washed out by the blood of the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

Come *now*. Your minister pleads with you on God's behalf.

Can it be right to slight God's invitation?

What harm can come of a conference with him?

Must it not be right to be reconciled with your Maker?

What if this day should see you made "white as snow?"

Enforcements.

A husband and wife had parted, and had been for years separated. He on several occasions entreated her to meet him, and talk over their differences with a view to reconciliation. She steadily declined an interview, and would not enter upon the subject of their alienation. Are you surprised when we add that the fault from the beginning lay with her? You

cannot doubt that the sin of their continued division was her's alone. The parable is easy to be interpreted.

Certain scarlet cloth is first dyed in the grain, and then dyed in the piece; it is thus double-dyed. And so are we with regard to the guilt of sin; we are double-dyed, for we are all sinners by birth, and sinners by practice. Our sins are like scarlet, yet by faith in Christ they shall be as white as snow: by an interest in Christ's atonement, though our offences be red like crimson, they shall be as wool; that is, they shall be as white as the undyed wool.

—"*Friendly Greetings.*"

When a dye enters into the very substance of the stuff, how can it be removed? Our own laundresses, by continually removing common stains, at length destroy the fabric of our linen; but what is to be done where art, and labor, and time have mingled the color and the cloth into one? With man this may be impossible, but not with God. When a man has taken up sin into him, till it is as much himself as his black skin is part and parcel of the Ethiopian, yet the Lord can put the sin away as thoroughly as if the negro became a fair Caucasian. He takes the spots out of human tigers, and leaves not one of them.

Consider how the Tyrian scarlet was dyed; not superficially dipped, but thoroughly drenched in the liquor that colored it, as thy soul in custom of

sinning. Then was it taken out for a time and dried, put in again, soaked and sodden the second time in the vat; called therefore twice-dyed; as thou complainest thou hast been by relapsing into the same sin. Yea, the color so incorporated into the cloth, not drawn over, but diving into the very heart of the wool, that, rub a scarlet rag on what is white, and it will bestow a reddish tincture upon it; as, perchance, thy sinful practice and precedent have also infected those which were formerly good, by thy badness. Yet such scarlet sins, so solemnly and substantially colored, are easily washed white in the blood of our Saviour.—*Thomas Fuller.*

LXX.

"O HOUSE OF JACOB, COME YE, AND LET US WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD!"—*Isaiah* ii. 5.

OH that the literal "house of Jacob" would walk in the light of Jehovah by acknowledging Jesus, who is the Dayspring from on high! Alas, they refuse the light, for the veil is upon their hearts! Let us pray for the ingathering of the tribes of Israel. Surely "it shall come to pass in the last days" (verse 2).

We will treat at this time of the spiritual Israel, even of the children of God at this hour.

I. HERE IS AN INVITATION. "Come ye, and let us walk in the light of Jehovah."

It is singular that the people of Jehovah should need such an invitation, for it seems natural that they should live in him, rejoice in him, and learn of him, seeing he is their own God.

It is a still more singular invitation in that it comes from the nations to the house of Jacob. The word of the Lord goes forth from Jerusalem, converts the nations, and then returns to the people from whom it first came. The parallel is found when the invitation comes to those of us who are believers.—

1. From those to whom we have ministered. How it rewards and encourages us to hear such a call from those who once refused the invitations of the gospel! When there is a move among the dry bones, we hope for the best results.
2. From new converts, who in their burning zeal urge on older saints, and thus create joy, and hint a gentle rebuke.
3. From saints bent on mutual edification. "Come *ye*, and let *us*." Here are willing brethren calling to others who are equally willing. Would God we had more of this!

Such invitations as these are healthy signs. We should encourage their production by mutual intercourse upon holy things.

II. LET US ACCEPT THIS INVITATION. "Let us walk in the light of the Lord."

No other light is comparable to it; especially for the Lord's own people. Jehovah should be the light of Jacob.

No other walking is so safe, so gladsome.

No other people are so able to walk in the light of God: their eyes are opened, their feet are strengthened, their hearts are purified, their actions suit the day.

1. In this light we find certainty for the mind. Reason makes guesses, or confesses that she knows nothing.

Fanaticism dotes on dreams and superstitions.
Human authority blunders.
Revelation alone is sure, infallible, unalterable. All other light is darkness when compared with it.

2. In this light we find rest for the conscience.
We see Jesus, his blood, and the perfect pardon which it procures.
We see his perfect righteousness covering us, and making us comely before God.

3. In this light we find direction for the judgment.
We see sin, love, providence, the future, &c., in their true colors, and know how to act in reference to them.
We learn to know the right way, and the wise course.
We discover the hidden snares, and are led to avoid them.

4. In this light we find delight for the soul.
In the purposes of the Lord. "Predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son."
In our personal condition in Christ. "Complete in him."
In the dealings of our Father's hand. "All things work together for good to them that love God," etc.
In the struggling which goes on within, which as a symptom of grace yields us comfortable hope.
In the future of death and eternity, which else would distress us.

5. In this light we find communion for the heart.
   We see God, and feel perfect peace.
   We see grace within, and enjoy full assurance.
   We see Jesus, and are in conscious union with him.
   We feel the Spirit of God, and are workers with him.
   We see the saints, and delight in their graces.

Beloved hearers, may the Holy Spirit lead you—
   To enter into the light of God.
   To remain in it, walking therein quietly from day to day.
   To make progress in it, walking onward toward perfection.

Come ye, and let us even now walk together in this light.

It shines perpetually, and we are the children of light.

Living in it here will prepare us for enjoying it in all its glorious brightness, where "the Lamb is the light."

Oil for the Light.

A weary and discouraged woman, after struggling all day with contrary winds and tides, came to her home, and flinging herself into a chair, said: "Everything looks dark, dark."

"Why don't you turn your face to the light, aunty dear?" said a little niece who was standing near.

The words were a message from on high, and the

weary eyes were turned toward him who is the Light and the Life of men, and in whose light alone we see light.

A man who looks toward the light sees no shadow; a man who walks toward the light leaves darkness behind him. People get in darkness by turning away from the light. They hide in obscure corners. they bury themselves in nooks where the rays of the Sun of Righteousness cannot reach them; they close their blinds and shutters, and wonder that they have no light.

A house may be dark, but it is not the fault of the sun. A soul may be dark, but it is not because the Light of the world does not shed beams abroad. He that followeth Christ "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." But if our deeds are evil, we shall turn away from God, and love darkness rather than light; while if we are willing to be reproved, corrected and guided in the right way, we shall find that "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Walking in the light, as Christ is in the light, we have fellowship with the Father, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.—*The Boston "Christian."*

It is worth noting how plants and trees turn to the light; how bleached vegetation becomes if it be shut up in darkness. The utter dark is dreadful to men, it may even be felt, so does it press upon the mind. The dimness of a foggy day depresses many

spirits more than trouble or pain. The cry of the sick man, "Would God it were morning!" is the groan of all healthy life when gloom surrounds it. What then can be said, if there be light, and we refuse it? He must have ill work on hand who loves the darkness. Only bats, and owls, and unclean and ravenous things are fond of the night. Children of light walk in the light, and reflect the light.

"Where the sun does not enter, the physician must;" so say the Italians, and their witness is true. Sunlight has not only a cheering but a health-giving influence. Along the Riviera, invalids owe everything to the sun; and when it is gone, they shrink into their own rooms. Chambers to which his warmth does not come are at a discount: the light is essential to restoration as well as to enjoyment.

LXXI.

"I WILL ALSO COMMAND THE CLOUDS THAT THEY RAIN NO RAIN UPON IT."—*Isaiah* v. 6.

RAIN essential for growth of seed and fruit, and its withdrawal for a length of time a terrible temporal judgment, especially in hot climates.

The spiritual rain of the Holy Spirit's influence essential to a spiritual life, in its beginning, growth, ripening, perfecting.

Its withdrawal the last and most terrible of judgments. (See whole verse.)

Especially is it a mark of anger for clouds to be overhead, and yet to drop no rain: to have the means of grace, but no grace with the means.

Let us consider,—

I. WHAT IT MEANS.

1. Ministers allowed to preach, but without power.
2. Ordinances celebrated, but without the benediction of the Lord.
3. Assemblies gathered, but the Lord not in the midst.
4. The Word read, but with no application to the heart.
5. Formality of prayer kept up, but no pleading with God.
6. The Holy Ghost restrained, and grieved.

This has been the case full often, and may be again with any church or person if sin be tolerated after warning. Is it so in the present assembly, or with any one in it?

The clouds, ordained to rain, are commanded not to do so; commanded by God himself, with whom is the key of the rain; commanded altogether to withhold their refreshing showers. There is no necessary connection between outward ordinances and grace; we may have clouds of the first, and no drops of the second.

II. What it involves.

1. No conversions, for these are by the Spirit.
2. No restorations of backsliders. Withered plants are not revived when there is no rain.
3. No refreshing of the weary: comfort and strength come not except by the dew of heaven.
4. No spiritual activities. Lukewarmness reigns through routine unto death. The workers move like persons walking in their sleep.
5. No holy joys, delights, triumphs.

As everything pines when there is no rain, so do all good things suffer when there is a spiritual drought.

Nothing can make up for it.

Nothing can flourish without it.

III. How it manifests itself.

A parched season spiritually has its own signs in the individual.

1. The soul experiences no benefit under the Word.
2. The man feels glutted with the gospel, and wearied with it.
3. He begins to criticise, carp, cavil, and despise the Word.
4. Soon he is apt to neglect the hearing of it.
5. Or he hears and perverts the Word, either to boasting, to ridicule, to controversy, or to ill-living.

It is a horrible thing when that which should be a savor of life unto life becomes a savor of death unto death, when even the clouds refuse to rain.

Is it so with any one of us?

IV. How it can be prevented.

Let us humbly use the means without putting our trust in them, and then let us,—

1. Confess our ill-desert. The Lord might justly have withheld his grace from us.
2. Acknowledge our dependence upon the heavenly showers of spiritual influence.
3. Pray incessantly, till, like Elias, we bring down the rain.
4. Look alone to Jesus. "He shall come down like rain."
5. Value the least sign of grace, watching for it as the prophet did from the top of Carmel, till he saw the little cloud arise from the sea.
6. Use the blessing more diligently when it returns, bringing forth fruit unto God.

Let this act as an *incentive to gratitude* to those who are wet with showers of blessing.

And as a *warning* to those who are losing their interest in the gatherings of the Sabbath.

Anecdotes and Aphorisms.

God's grace can save souls without any preaching: but all the preaching in the world cannot save souls without God's grace.—*Benjamin Beddome.*

The hearer sometimes complains that there is no food for his soul; when the truth is that there is no soul for the food.—*Joseph Parker.*

Every preacher must have felt that in certain places his labor is in vain. For some cause unknown to him, there is no response to his appeals, no fruit of his teaching. I knew a place from which Mr. Whitefield was chased away, and it was said of it that ever since there appeared to be a blight upon it; and indeed it seemed so. I have seen churches acting wrongly, and becoming withered from that time. On the other hand, we feel when there is dew about, and we know when there is a sound of abundance of rain. I have preached at times with the absolute certainty of success because a grace-shower was on saint and sinner, on preacher and people.

In a newspaper we met with the following:—

"There was an old turnpike-man, on a quiet country road, whose habit was to shut his gate at

night, and take his nap. One dark, wet midnight I knocked at his door, calling, 'Gate, gate!' 'Coming,' said the voice of the old man. Then I knocked again, and once more the voice replied, 'Coming.' This went on for some time, till at length I grew quite angry, and jumping off my horse, opened the door, and demanded why he cried 'Coming' for twenty minutes, and never came. 'Who is there?' said the old man, in a quiet, sleepy voice, rubbing his eyes. 'What d'ye want, sir?' Then awakening, 'Bless yer, sir, and ax yer pardon, I was asleep; I gets so used to hearing 'em knock, that I answer "coming" in my sleep, and take no more notice about it.'"

Thus may the ministry accomplish nothing because the habitual hearer remains in a deep sleep, out of which the Spirit of God alone can awaken him. When the secret influence from heaven ceases to speak to the heart, the best speaking to the ear avails little.

LXXII.

"WHAT SHALL ONE THEN ANSWER THE MESSENGERS OF THE NATION? THAT THE LORD HATH FOUNDED ZION, AND THE POOR OF HIS PEOPLE SHALL TRUST IN IT.—*Isaiah* xiv. 32.

IT is clear that Zion attracts attention. The messengers of the nations enquire concerning her.

The church excites attention by—

The peculiarity of her people.
The specialty of her teaching.
The singularity of her claims.
The greatness of her privileges.

It is so good a thing to have this attention excited, that one should be ever ready to give an answer, for this is the way by which the truth is spread in the earth.

Oh that all nations would send messengers to enquire concerning our King, and his reign! Perhaps they will when we are what we ought to be, and are ready to answer their enquiries.

I. WHAT DO THE MESSENGERS ASK?

They come as the ambassadors from Babylon to see everything.

They ask questions, as did the Queen of Sheba.

Concerning Zion, or the church, they ask:—

1. What is her origin? (Ps. lxxviii. 68, 69.)
2. What is her history? (Ps. lxxxvii. 3.)
3. Who is her King? (Ps. xcix. 2.)
4. What is her charter? (Gal. iv. 26.)
5. What are her laws? (Ezek. xliii. 12.)
6. What is her treasure? (Ps. cxlvii. 12–14, Rev. xxi. 21.)
7. What is her present security? (Ps. xlviii. 13.)
8. What is her future destiny? (Ps. cii. 16.)

There is nothing about Zion which is unworthy of their enquiry.

There is nothing about Zion which is closed against enquiry.

II. WHY DO THEY ASK?

1. Some from mere contempt. "What do these feeble Jews?" They would see the nakedness of the land. Perhaps when they know more their contempt will evaporate.
2. Some from idle curiosity. Yet many who come to us from that poor motive are led to Christ. Zaccheus comes down from his tree as he did not go up.
3. Some from hearty admiration. They enquire, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?" They have seen his star, and are come to worship, asking, "Where is he?"

4. Some from a desire to become citizens. How can they be initiated? What is the price of her franchise? What will be required of her burgesses? Is there room for more citizens?

They are wise thus to ask, and count the cost.

Men can hardly remain indifferent when the true Church of God is near them: for some reason or another they will enquire.

III. WHY SHOULD THEY BE ANSWERED?

1. It may silence their cavils.
2. It may win them to God.
3. It will do us good to give a reason for the hope that is in us.
4. It will glorify God to tell of what his grace has done for his church and of what it is prepared to do.

The answers should be prudently suited to the enquirer.

They should be clear, bold, truthful, and joyous.

We should think before we give an answer. "What shall one answer?" Our manner in answering should be gracious. (1 Pet. iii. 15.)

The answer should refer rather to God than to ourselves: it is so in the text now before us.

IV. WHAT SHOULD BE THE ANSWER?

1. That God is all in all to his church,—"The Lord hath."

2. That her origin is from him,—"The Lord hath founded Zion."
3. That his people are poor in themselves, and rely upon another. It is a city to which the poor flee for refuge, as many fled to the cave of Adullam who were in debt and discontented.
4. That their trust is in the foundation which the Lord hath laid.
5. That we resolve to abide in that trust,—"The poor of his people shall trust in it."

If you ungodly ones would only ask the righteous concerning their hope, it would be well.

If you godly ones would tell enquirers your experience, it might do great good. "That we may seek him with thee:" (Solomon's Song, vi. 1.)

Incentives.

Visiting a vaulted passage in the palace of Nero, at Rome, we were shown certain frescoes upon the roof. To exhibit these a candle was lifted up upon a telescopic rod, and then moved along from picture to picture. Let the candle stand for the believer, and let him be willing to be so elevated in life as to shine upon those high mysteries of our holy faith which else had never been perceived by other men. Eminent saints in the past have served such a purpose: their lives have cast a light upon priceless truths, which else had been forgotten.

If a man should ask me, after I have recovered from an illness, by what means I had been healed, should I not tell him with pleasure? To monopolize such information would be monstrous. The church of Christ is not a close borough, or a club with exclusive rules. Its walls are for inclusion, not for exclusion; its gates shut out no refugees who would enter. All that we know we are glad to tell, for all that there is to tell is glad tidings to our fellow-men.

A young Kaffir, who was brought to England to be educated for mission-work in his own country, when taken to St. Paul's Cathedral, gazed up into the dome for some time as if lost in wonder, and when at length he broke silence, it was to ask, "Did man make this?" Those who obtain a view of the grandeur and glory of the spiritual temple may ask a similar question. We can tell them that its "Builder and Maker is God."

Enquirers should be answered. It is never well to be dumb to attentive ears. As some one has wisely said, "we shall have to give an account of idle silence, as well as of idle speech."

Our testimony should be bright and cheerful. The dismal tale some tell of trials and temptations is not likely to fetch home the prodigal from the far country: such lean and discontented followers will never make anybody say, "How many hired servants of my Father have bread enough, and to spare!"

—*Mark Guy Pearse*

To the matter of the safety of the church, through the presence of the Lord, we may apply the following dialogue between a heathen and a Jew:—"After the Jews returned from captivity—all nations around about them being enemies to them—a heathen asked a Jew how he and his countrymen could hope for any safety, 'because,' saith he, 'every one of you is as a silly sheep compassed about with fifty wolves.' 'Ay, but,' saith the Jew, 'we are kept by such a Shepherd as can kill all these wolves when he pleases, and by that means preserve his sheep.'"

—*Thomas Brooks.*

LXXIII.

"A MAN SHALL BE AS AN HIDING-PLACE FROM THE WIND, AND A COVERT FROM THE TEMPEST.—*Isaiah* xxxii. 2.

GOD'S best blessings to men have usually come by men.

When our Lord ascended on high, he received gifts for men, and these gifts were men. (Ps. lxviii. 18. Eph. iv. 8. 11.)

Immense boons have come to nations by kings like David, prophets like Samuel, deliverers like Gideon, lawgivers like Moses.

But what are all good men put together compared with THE MAN Christ Jesus?

We are now to view him as our shield against ten thousand ills: the hiding-place and covert of his people.

Let us consider that,—

I. THIS LIFE IS LIABLE TO STORMS.

1. Mysterious hurricanes within, which cause the most dreadful confusion of mind. Winds, whose direction is uncertain, shaking everything, creating unrest and distraction. Frequently no definite cause can be assigned for them; the cause may be constitutional, or physical, or circumstantial.

2. Overwhelming tempests of spiritual distress on account of sin, wrong desire, conscious declension, unbelief, &c.
3. Fierce blasts of temptation, insinuation, suggestion, denunciation, etc., from Satan.
4. Wild attacks from human enemies, who taunt, slander, threaten, etc. David was wont to use this refuge. He says, "I flee unto thee to hide me:" Ps. cxliii. 9.
5. Trying gales of temporal losses, bereavements, and other afflictions.
6. Above all, the storm of divine anger when we have grieved the Holy Spirit, and lost communion with God.

None of these winds and tempests are we able to bear: our only safety lies in getting out of them by finding a shelter where God has provided it. (Is. xxv. 4, xxvi. 20. Ps. xxxii. 7.)

II. From these storms the Man Christ Jesus is our hiding-place.

1. As truly man. Sympathizing with us, and Bringing God near to us.
2. As more than man, ruling every tempest, covering every feeble traveller, as within the cleft of a rock.
3. As Substitutionary Man, interposing, breasting the storm for us, hiding us by being weather-beaten himself.
4. As Representative Man, more than conqueror, and glorified.

In him we are delivered from divine wrath.

In him we are covered from Satan's blasts.

In him we dwell above trial by happy fellowship with him.

In him we are victors over death.

5. As Ever-living Man: we live because he lives, and thus we defy the tempest of death. John xiv. 19.
6. As Interceding Man. He says, "I have prayed for thee," when Satan is seeking to destroy any one of us: Luke xxii. 32.
7. As the Coming Man. We dread no political catastrophes, or social disruptions, for "he must reign." The end is secured. "Behold, he cometh with clouds:" Rev. i. 7.

III. LET US SEE TO IT THAT WE TAKE SHELTER IN THE MAN.

1. Let him stand before us, interposing between us and the punishment of sin. Hide behind him by faith.
2. Let him daily cover us from all evil, as our Shield and Protector. Ps. cxix. 114.
3. Let us enter into him more and more fully, that we may be more hidden, that he may be more known to us, and that we may have a fuller sense of security.

O you that are out of Christ, the tempest is lowering! Come to this covert; hasten to this hiding-place!

He is an effectual shelter, tried and proved.

He is an open refuge, available now for you.

He is a capacious hiding-place: "Yet there is room." As in Adullum all David's army could hide, so is Jesus able to receive hosts of sinners.

He is an eternal covert: our dwelling-place throughout all generations.

He is an inviting shelter, because he is Man, and therefore has compassion towards men, and a joy in their salvation.

Instances and Instructions.

Well do I remember being caught in the mistral at Hyeres, when it blew with unusual fury; it not only drove clouds of dust with terrible force, but boughs of trees, and all sorts of light material were propelled with tremendous force. One wondered that a tree remained upright, or a fence in its place. What a joy it was to hide behind a solid wall, and under its shelter to run along till we were safe within doors! Then we knew in some measure the value of a hiding-place from the wind. But what is that to a cyclone, which tears down houses, and lifts ships upon the dry land? Friends who have lived abroad have startled us with their descriptions of what wind can be, and they have made us cease to wonder that a hiding-place should be greatly prized by dwellers in eastern lands.

The tempest's awful voice was heard;
O Christ, it broke on thee!
Thy open bosom was my ward,
It braved the storm for me.
Thy form was scarred, thy visage marred;
Now cloudless peace for me.

—*Sacred Songs and Solos.*

I creep under my Lord's wings in the great shower, and the waters cannot reach me. Let fools laugh the fools' laughter, and scorn Christ, and bid the weeping captives in Babylon to sing them one of the songs of Zion. We may sing, even in our winter's storm, in the expectation of a summer's sun at the turn of the year. No created powers in hell, or out of hell, can mar our Lord's work, or spoil our song of joy. Let us then, be glad and rejoice in the salvation of our Lord, for faith had never yet cause to have tearful eyes, or a saddened brow, or to droop or die.—*Samuel Rutherford.*

A shelter is nothing if we stand in front of it. The main thought with many a would-be Christian is his own works, feelings, and attainments: this is to stand on the windy side of the wall by putting self before Jesus. Our safety lies in getting behind Christ, and letting him stand in the wind's eye. We must be altogether hidden, or Christ cannot be our hiding-place.

Foolish religionists hear about the hiding-place, but never get into it. How great is the folly of such conduct! It makes Jesus to be of no value or effect. What is a roof to a man who lies in the open,

or a boat to one who sinks in the sea? Even the Man Christ Jesus, though ordained of God to be a covert from the tempest, can cover none but those who are in him. Come then, poor sinner, enter where you may; hide in him who was evidently meant to hide you, for he was ordained to be a hiding-place, and must be used as such, or the very aim of his life and death would be missed.

LXXIV.

"A MAN SHALL BE . . . AS RIVERS OF WATER IN A DRY PLACE."—*Isaiah* xxxii. 2.

OUR Lord Jesus is nearest and dearest to us as Man.

His manhood reminds us of—

His incarnation, in which he assumed our nature.

His life on earth, in which he honored our nature.

His death, by which he redeemed our nature.

His resurrection, by which he upraised our nature.

Consider the Word made flesh, and you have before you "rivers of water." "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell."

Though manhood seems to be a dry place, a salt and barren land, yet in the case of this Man it yields rivers of water,—numberless streams, abounding with refreshment.

Let us learn from the simile before us:—

I. THAT NATURE'S DROUGHT DOES NOT HINDER CHRIST'S COMING TO MEN.

1. He came into the dry place of a fallen, ruined, rebellious world.

2. He comes to men personally, notwithstanding their being without strength, without righteousness, without desire, without life.
3. He flows within us in rivers of grace, though the old nature continues to be a dry and parched land.
4. He continues the inflowing of his grace till he perfects us, and this he does though decay of nature, failure, and fickleness prove us to be as a dry place.

"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

II. That nature's drought enhances the preciousness of Christ.

1. He is the more quickly discovered; as rivers would be in a desert.
2. He is the more highly valued; as water in a torrid clime.
3. He is the more largely used; as streams in a burning wilderness.
4. He is the more surely known to be the gift of God's grace. How else came he to be in so dry a place? Those who are most devoid of merit are the more clear as to God's grace.
5. He is the more gratefully extolled. Men sing of rivers which flow through dreary wastes.

III. That nature's drought is most effectually removed by Christ.

Rivers change the appearance and character of a

dry place. By our Lord Jesus appearing in our manhood as Emmanuel, God with us,—

1. Our despair is cheered away.
2. Our sinfulness is purged.
3. Our nature is renewed.
4. Our barrenness is removed.
5. Our trials are overcome.
6. Our fallen condition is changed to glory.

The desert of manhood rejoices and blossoms as the rose now that the Man Christ Jesus has appeared in it.

IV. THAT OUR OWN SENSE OF DROUGHT SHOULD LEAD US THE MORE HOPEFULLY TO APPLY TO CHRIST.

He is rivers of water in a dry place. The dry place is his sphere of action. Nature's want is the platform for the display of grace.

1. This is implied in our Lord's offices. A Saviour for sinners. A Priest who can have compassion on the ignorant, etc.
2. This is remembered in his great qualifications. Rivers, because the place is so dry. Full of grace and truth, because we are so sinful and false. Mighty to save, because we are so lost, &c.
3. This is manifested by the persons to whom he comes. Not many great or mighty are chosen. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." He calls "the

chief of sinners." In every case the rivers of love flow into a dry place.

4. This is clear from the object which he aimed at, namely, the glory of God, and the making known of the riches of his grace. This can be best accomplished by working salvation where there is no apparent likelihood of it, or, in other words, causing rivers to water dry places.

Come to Jesus, though your nature be dry, and your case hopeless.

Come, for there are rivers of grace in him.

Come, for they flow at your feet,—"in a dry place."

Come, if you have come before, and are just now in a backsliding condition. The Lord Jesus is still the same; the rivers of mercy in him can never be dried up.

Christ never seems empty to any but those who are full of themselves. He is dry to those who overflow with personal fulness, but he floods with his grace all who are dried up as to all self-reliance.

RIVULETS.

It is my sweetest comfort, Lord,
And will for ever be,
To muse upon the gracious truth
Of thy humanity.

—*Edward Caswall.*

Men that have dry land spare no cost, refuse no pains, to bring rivulets of waters through it, that it

may be moistened. It will, they know, in a little time, quit all their cost, and recompense all their labor. Oh, that men would be as careful that their dry hearts might be watered!—*Ralph Robinson.*

The claims of Jesus Christ upon our gratitude and devotion are such that we gladly borrow language from any that may help us to utter his praise. Thus Dr. Marsh adopted Pope's lines, altering only the last words,—

> Not bubbling waters to the thirsty swain,
> Not rest to weary laborers, faint with pain,
> Not showers to larks, not sunshine to the bee,
> Are half so precious as thy love to me—
> My Saviour.

With what joy do travellers through the Bayuda desert come within sight of the Nile! While toiling over the burning sand they have dreamed of rivers, and the mirage mocks them with the image of their day-dream. The fiction enchants them because the fact would be so delightful. What must it be actually to drink of the stream after terrible hours of thirst? Hindoos worship their rivers as gods, so precious do they conceive them to be. Do you wonder that the gratitude of the ignorant should take such a form? What would their hot country be without them? What would our hearts, our lives, our present, our future, be without Christ? What would be the outlook of the age—what the prospect of our nation—what the destiny of the world, without the Lord Jesus?

What we want in Christ, we always find in him.

When we want nothing, we find nothing. When we want little, we find little. When we want much, we find much. But when we want everything, and get reduced to complete nakedness and beggary, we find in Christ God's complete treasure-house, out of which come gold and jewels to enrich us, and garments to clothe us in the richness and righteousness of the Lord.—*Sears.*

LXXV.

"BEHOLD, FOR PEACE I HAD GREAT BITTERNESS: BUT THOU HAST IN LOVE TO MY SOUL DELIVERED IT FROM THE PIT OF CORRUPTION: FOR THOU HAST CAST ALL MY SINS BEHIND THY BACK.—*Isaiah* xxxviii. 17.

HERE is the case of a man who, as far as mortal help was concerned, was a dead man, and yet prayer prevailed for his recovery, and the lengthening of his life.

He records his experience for the glory of God, for his own refreshment, and for our encouragement.

In our deep depressions we have the same God to help us.

Hezekiah sets before us in this verse,—

I. HEALTHFUL BITTERNESS. "For peace I had bitter bitterness" (*margin.*)

1. He had been in peace. Probably this had brought with it a dangerous state, in which the mind became carnally secure, self-contented, stagnant, slumbering, careless, worldly.
2. He underwent a change. It was sudden and surprising,—"Behold." It broke up all his peace, and took the place of it.
3. His new state was one of emphatic sorrow, —"Bitterness." "Great bitterness." In

bodily condition and in mental emotion he tasted the wormwood and the gall. Read previous verses, and see how he mourned.

4. It wrought his health. "So wilt thou recover me" (verse 16.)
   It led him to repentance for the past. He speaks of "my sins."
   It brought him to his knees in prayer.
   It revealed his inward decline, and weakness of grace.
   It made him put away his defilements.
   It deepened his faith in God. "The Lord was ready to save me" (verse 20).
5. Peace came back again, and with it songs of joy.

If any are now drinking the bitter cup, let them be of good cheer, for there is a cup of salvation in God's hand.

II. DELIVERING LOVE. "In love to my soul thou hast delivered it."

In its first meaning we see recovery from sickness, but it intends much more: upon the surface lies benefit to his soul.

Let us observe—

1. The deed of love. "Thou hast loved my soul from the pit" (*margin.*)
   The Lord delivers the soul from the pit of hell, of sin, of despair, of temptation, of death. He alone can do this.
2. The love which performed the deed.

Love suggested and ordained it.

Love actually performed it by its own hands. "In love to my soul thou has loved it from the pit."

Love breaks the heart, and binds it up.

Love sets us free, and then holds us captive.

We are by love loved out of sorrow, rebellion, despondency, coldness, and weakness. Acknowledge this heartily.

Measure this love by your demerit, your danger, your present complete safety, and by the greatness of the Deliverer, and what the delivery cost him.

Treasure this love, and sing of it all the days of your life.

III. ABSOLUTE PARDON. "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

1. This was the cause of his restored peace. He was burdened while sin remained, but when that was gone, peace returned.
2. This removed the whole burden. "Sins;" "my sins;" "all my sins."
3. This involved effort on God's part. "Thou has cast." We remember the more than herculean labors of Jesus, who has hurled our load into the bottomless deep.
4. This is wonderfully described. "Behind thy back:" this is—The place of desertion. God has gone from our sin never to return to it. He has left it for ever, and it will

never cross his path again, for he never moves backward.

The place of forgetfulness: he will not remember it any more.

The place of nonentity: nothing is behind the back of God.

Therefore we will *tell* others our story, as Hezekiah has told us his. Let us seek out one or more who will hear us with attention.

"Therefore we will *sing* my songs to the stringed instruments" (verse 20). At this hour let us lift up the voice of gratitude.

Enlargements.

Thomas Bilney, the martyr, after his submission to the Papacy, being brought again to repentance, was, as Latimer reports, for a time inconsolable. "His friends dared not suffer him to be alone day or night. They comforted him as they could, but no comforts would serve; and as for the comfortable places of Scripture, to bring them to him was as though a man should run him through the heart with a sword.

Now friend, give me your answer: Is it best to see sin and guilt *now*, while you may see a Saviour also; or to see sin and a judge hereafter, but no Saviour? Sin you shall see, as we say, in spite of your teeth, will you, nil you. Oh, then, let me see sin and guilt *now;* Oh, *now*, with a sweet Saviour,

that I may have this woful sight past when I come to die.—*Giles Firmin.*

"*Thou hast cast*," &c. These last words are a borrowed speech, taken from the manner of men, who are wont to cast behind their backs such things as they have no mind to see, regard, or remember. A gracious soul hath always his sins before his face: "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me;" and therefore no wonder if the Lord cast them behind his back. A father soon forgets and casts behind his back those faults that the child remembers and hath always before his eyes, so doth the Father of spirits.—*Thomas Brooks.*

I have read somewhere of a great divine (I think it was Œcolampadius), who being recovered from a great sickness, said, "I have learned under this sickness to know *sin* and *God*." Did he not know these before? Doubtless he could preach good sermons concerning God and sin; but the Spirit, it seems, in that sickness, taught him these otherwise than he knew them before.—*Giles Firmin.*

Some of the pits referred to in the Bible were prisons; one such I saw at Athens, and another at Rome. To these there were no openings, except a hole at the top, which served for both door and window. The bottoms of these pits were necessarily in a filthy and revolting state, and sometimes deep in mud. Isaiah speaks of "the pit of corruption," or putrefaction and filth.—*John Gadsby.*

Dr. Watts, from his early infancy to his dying

day, scarcely ever knew what health was; but however surprising it may appear, he looked on the affliction as the greatest blessing of his life. The reason he assigned for it was, that, being naturally of a warm temper, and an ambitious disposition, these visitations of divine providence weaned his affections from the world, and brought every passion into subjection to Christ. This he often mentioned to his dear friend, Sir Thomas Abney, in whose house he lived many years.—*John Whitecross.*

LXXVI.

"LOOK UNTO ME, AND BE YE SAVED, ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH: FOR I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NONE ELSE."—*Isaiah* xlv. 22.

THE nations have been looking to their idols for all these centuries, but in vain.

Many of them are looking to their boasted philosophies, and still in vain.

False religions, politics, alliances, theories, organizations, men—all will be in vain to save the nations.

They must look to God: the God of all the families of the earth.

Happy are we that we live in a time when God's command to the nations is proclaimed abroad. Be it ours to spread the saving truth, and bid men look and live.

The same principle applies to individuals. If they would be saved they must look to the Lord.

If you, O hearer, would be saved, here is the only method,—"Look."

I. WHAT MEANS THIS WORD "LOOK" IN REFERENCE TO GOD?

It includes many things; as for instance—

1. Admit his reality by looking to him. Consider that there is a God, and enthrone him in

your mind as a real Person, the true God, and your Lord. Let the Invisible God be to you as real as that which you see with your eyes.

2. Address yourself to him by prayer, thanksgiving, thought, obedience, reverence, &c., looking to him so as to know him, and recognise his presence.
3. Acknowledge that from him only salvation can come. Regard him as the only possible Saviour. "There is none else."
4. Anticipate that HE will bless you: look for his interposition.
5. Abide alone in HIM for salvation. Keep your eyes fixed on him, as the Morning Star of your day.

II. FOR WHAT PART OF SALVATION ARE WE THUS TO LOOK?

For every part of it from beginning to end.

1. Pardon. This must be God's act, and it can only come through the atonement which he has provided in Christ Jesus.
2. Preparation for pardon, namely, life, repentance, faith. Grace must prepare us for more grace.
3. Renewal of heart is the Holy Ghost's work: look to him for it. Regeneration must be of the Lord alone.
4. Sustenance in spiritual life is of the Lord alone. All growth, strength, fruit, must be looked for from him.

5. Daily succor in common things is as much a divine gift as great deliverances. Our look should be constant, and it should comprise expectancy for time as well as eternity.

Any one matter left to self would ruin us altogether.

III. WHAT IS OUR ENCOURAGEMENT TO LOOK?

1. His command. He bids us look, and therefore we may look.
2. His promise. He says, "look, and be saved," and he will never run back from his own word.
3. His Godhead. "For I am God." All things are possible to him: his mercy is equal to our salvation, his glory will be manifest thereby.
4. His character, as "a just God and a Saviour." (See verse 21). This combination is seen by those who know the cross, and it is full of hope to sinners.
5. His broad invitation: "all the ends of the earth." Each seeking soul may be sure that he is included therein.

Who will refuse so simple an act as to look.

IV. WHAT IS THE BEST TIME IN WHICH TO LOOK?

Look now, at this very moment.

1. The command is in the present tense: "Look unto me."
2. The promise is in the same tense: "and be ye

saved." It is a fiat, like "light be." It takes immediate effect.

3. Your need of salvation is urgent: you are already lost.
4. The present time is yours, no other time is yours to use; for the past is gone, and the future will be present when it comes.
5. Your time may soon end. Death comes suddenly. Age creeps on us. The longest life is short.
6. It is the time which God chooses: it is ours to accept it.

This is a great soul-saving text: give earnest heed to it.

All who have obeyed it are saved: why should you not at once be saved? This is the one command, "Look! Look!"

Stories and Brevities.

A striking example of prayer unto "gods that cannot save" is given by Miss Isabella Bird, who describes a service in a Buddhist temple in Japan, when a popular priest preached to a vast congregation on future punishment, *i. e.*, the tortures of the Buddhist hells. When he concluded, the people, slightly raising the hands on which the rosaries were wound, answered with the roar of a mighty response, "Eternal Buddha, save!"

To this text, under God, I owe my own deliverance

from despair. An explanation of the work of Jesus, given by a humble, unlettered lay preacher, was followed by a direct appeal to me. "Young man, you are miserable, and you will never be happy unless you obey this message. Look! Look!" I did look, and in that instant lost my crushing load of guilt. It was all clear to me. Jesus had taken the sins of all believers. I believed, and knew that he had taken mine, and therefore I was clear. The matchless truth of the substitution of the divine Lord for me was light and liberty to my soul. A look saved me, and for my present salvation I have no other resort but still to look. "Looking unto Jesus," is a motto both for penitent and preacher, for sinner and saint.—C. H. S.

There is an affecting story of a celebrated literary man, Heinrich Heine, who was prematurely disabled by disease, and utterly heart-sick and weary. In one of the art-palaces of Paris there is the famous statue called the Venus of Milo, the bewitching goddess of pleasure, which, by the rude accident of time, has lost both her arms, but still preserves much of her supreme, enchanting beauty. At the feet of this statue Heine cast himself down in remorse and despair, and, to use his own words, "There I lay a long time, and wept so passionately that a stone must have had compassion on me. The goddess looked down compassionately upon me, but she was helpless to console me. She looked as if she would say—'See you not that I have no arms, and that

therefore I can give you no help?'" So, vain and useless is it to look to any for spiritual help and comfort, except to Him of whom it is declared, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save."

Some divines would need a week in which to tell you what you are to do to be saved: but the Holy Ghost only uses four letters to do it. Four letters, and two of them alike—"Look!"

Be not like the man in the Interpreter's house, whose eyes were fixed on the ground where he was raking together straws and dust, and who would not look up to him who was offering him a celestial crown. Look up! Look up!

LXXVII.

"AND EVEN TO YOUR OLD AGE I AM HE; AND EVEN TO HOAR HAIRS WILL I CARRY YOU: I HAVE MADE AND I WILL BEAR; EVEN I WILL CARRY, AND WILL DELIVER YOU."—*Isaiah* xlvi. 4.

THE doctrine of the text is the unchanging nature of God, and the constancy of his kindness towards his people in providence and grace.

We need scarcely prove the unchanging nature of God's dealings with his people, during the short period of mortal life, when—

In nature we see many things unchanged during seventy or eighty years: sun, ocean, rocks, &c.

We see his Word and gospel to be still the same.

Prayer, praise, communion, and holy service are the same.

Our experience is similar to that of saints in the olden time.

Especially we remember that the very nature of God places mutability beyond the range of supposition.

Of the Lord's dealings in providence and grace it is scarcely necessary to prove the immutability, when we remind you—

That the mercies of one age are in the main identical with those of another; and the promises are altogether unaltered.

That holy men are ready to testify to the faithfulness of God, and that both now and in the past the witnesses to his divine truth and immutability are many.

That divine strength is not dependent on man's weakness; divine love is not changed by man's demerits; and divine truth is not affected by lapse of years.

That the completion of the body of Christ requires the preservation of all the saints, and therefore the Lord must abide the same to every one of them.

Yet without doubt "old age" has its peculiarities, which do but serve to evidence the firmness of God's grace.

I. It hath its Peculiar Memories.

1. It remembers many joys, and it sees in them proofs of love.
2. It remembers many visits to the house of sickness, and it recollects how the Lord cheered its desolate chamber.
3. It remembers many trials in its loss of friends, and its changes of condition, but it sees HIM to have been ever the same.
4. It remembers many conflicts with temptation, doubt, Satan, the flesh, and the world; but

it remembers how HE covered its head in the day of battle.

5. It remembers its own many sins; and it is not forgetful how many professors have made shipwreck of faith; but it clearly sees covenant faithfulness in its own preservation.

All our recollections are unanimous in their testimony to an unchanging God.

II. It hath its Peculiar Hopes.

It has now few things to anticipate; but those few are the same as in younger days, for the covenant abides unaltered.

1. The Ground of its hope is still Jesus, and not long service.
2. The Reason of its hope is still faith in the infallible Word.
3. The Preservation of its hope is still in the same hands.
4. The End of its hope is still the same heaven, the same crown of life and blessedness.
5. The Joy of its hope is still as bright and cheering as before.

III. It hath its Peculiar Solicitudes.

Cares are fewer, for business is curtailed, and the needs which remain only serve to show that God is the same.

1. The Body is infirm, but grace makes amends for the departed joys of youth, health, and activity.

2. The Mind is weaker, the memory less retentive, and the imagination less vivid; but gracious doctrines are more sweet than ever, and eternal verities sustain the heart.
3. Death is nearer, but then Heaven is nearer too. Earth may be less lovely, but the home-country is dearer, since more loved ones have entered it, and have left us fewer ties to earth.
4. Preparation by Examination is now more imperative, but it is also more easy, since repetition has removed its difficulties, faith has more constancy, and tried promises afford richer comfort.

All these prove God the same.

IV. It hath its Peculiar Blessedness.

Deprived of certain enjoyments, age is enriched with others.

1. It has a long experience to read, proving the promise true.
2. It has less wavering in its doctrines, *knowing* now what once it only guessed.
3. It has less to fear in the future of life, seeing the way is shorter.
4. It has more divine unveilings of the celestial regions, for it is now in the land Beulah.
5. It has less business on earth, and more in heaven, and hence it has an inducement to be more heavenly-minded.

Here is divine love made manifest as still the same.

V. It hath its Peculiar Duties.

These are proofs of divine faithfulness, since they cause men to bring forth fruit in old age. They are—

1. Testimony to the goodness of God, the unchangeableness of his love, and the certainty of his revelation.
2. Comfort to others who are battling, assuring them that they will come off safely.
3. Warning to the wayward: such warning coming with tenfold force from the aged saint.
4. And frequently we may add—

   Instruction, since the old man's experience has opened up many a mystery unknown before.

From the whole we gather—

A lesson to the young to make this God their God, since he will never forsake his people.

A Solace for men in middle life to persevere, for they shall still be carried in the arms of grace.

A song for the aged, concerning undying love and unchanging mercy. With mellowed voice let it be sung.

To the Point.

Dr. O. W. Holmes says, "Men, like peaches and pears, grow sweet a little while before they begin to decay." This is true; but Christian men should be sweet from the hour that they are renewed in heart. Yet even then maturity brings a special mellowness.

Of the Christian it has been said, "The decay and wasting and infirmities of old age will be, as Dr. Guthrie called these symptoms of his own approaching death, only 'the land-birds lighting on the shrouds, telling the weary mariner that he is nearing the desired haven.'"

It is a favorite speculation of mine that, if spared to sixty, we then enter on the seventh decade of human life, and that this, if possible, should be turned into the Sabbath of our earthly pilgrimage, and spent Sabbatically, as if on the shores of an eternal world, or in the outer courts, as it were, of the temple that is above, the tabernacle that is in heaven.—*Dr. Chalmers.*

LXXVIII.

"THE CHILDREN WHICH THOU SHALT HAVE, AFTER THOU HAST LOST THE OTHER, SHALL SAY AGAIN IN THINE EARS, THE PLACE IS TOO STRAIT FOR ME: GIVE PLACE TO ME THAT I MAY DWELL.

"THEN SHALT THOU SAY IN THINE HEART, WHO HATH BEGOTTEN ME THESE, SEEING I HAVE LOST MY CHILDREN, AND AM DESOLATE, A CAPTIVE, AND REMOVING TO AND FRO? AND WHO HATH BROUGHT UP THESE? BEHOLD, I WAS LEFT ALONE; THESE, WHERE HAD THEY BEEN?"—*Isaiah* xlix. 20, 21.

A HOPEFUL mood becomes the church of God, for the memories of the past, the blessings of the present, and the promises of the future are full of good cheer.

"All the promises do travail with a glorious day of grace."

The church lives, progresses, conquers by her faith; let her abandon despondency, as her weakness, her sin, her greatest hindrance.

The prophet, to remove all fear, reminds us that—

I. IN THE CHURCH THERE ARE DECREASES. "I have lost my children," etc. This is frequently the bitter cry of a church.

1. Death invades the house of God, and takes away those who were its pillars and orna-

ments. But those who depart go to swell the chorus of heaven.

2. Providence takes away useful persons by removal, or by excessive occupation which keeps them from holy service. The removed ones go to build up the church elsewhere: those who are lawfully detained by business are still doing the Lord's will.
3. Sin causes some to backslide, wander away, or become inactive. But they go from us because they are not of us.

This decrease is painful, and it may go so far that a church may feel itself to be "desolate," and "left alone." Yet the Lord has not forgotten his church, for he is her Husband.

II. IN THE CHURCH WE SHOULD LOOK FOR INCREASE. "The children which thou shalt have."

Let us not be absorbed in lamenting losses; let us rejoice by faith in great gains which are surely coming.

1. Increase is needful, or what will become of the church?
2. Increase is prayed for, and God hears prayer.
3. Increase can only come through God, but he will give it, and be glorified by it.
4. Increase is promised in the text, and in many other Scriptures.
5. Increase is to be labored for with agony of

heart. "As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth children."

III. In the church increase often causes surprise.

So narrow are our hearts, so weak our faith, that we are amazed when conversions are numerous.

1. Because of the time: "Behold, I was left alone."
2. Because of their number: "Who hath begotten me these?"
3. Because of their former character: "These, where had they been?" They were not after all so very far off.

   Some of them were quite near to us and near to the kingdom, in the family, school, class, congregation, enquiry-room.

   Others were far off in irreligion, and open sin.

   Others were opposed through rationalism, superstition, or self-righteousness.
4. Because of their good nurture: "Who hath brought up these?"
5. Because of their eagerness and courage. "Shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me."
6. Because of their constancy. "Give place to me that I may *dwell*."

   They come to remain.

Where had they been? Say rather, "Where had *we* been?" that we had not long ago looked after them, and welcomed them.

IV. IN THE CHURCH INCREASE SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR.

We make ready for the coming of children. Is the church an unnatural mother? Will she not welcome new-born souls?

We must prepare for an increase—

1. By intense united prayer for it.
2. By the preaching of the gospel, which is the means of it.
3. By every form of Christian effort which may lead to it.
4. By enlarging our bounds: "The place is too strait for me." To provide a larger audience-chamber may be a true act of faith.
5. By welcoming all true-born children of God: who say, each one, "give place to me that I may dwell."

Oh, for a triumphant faith that the little one shall become a thousand!

Oh, for grace to act upon such faith at once!

"Believe great things; attempt great things; expect great things."

NOTES.

My observation leads me to believe that, where churches are duly careful in the admission of members, they will find that their best converts come in flocks. My impression is that, when very few come

forward, everybody leans towards a less exact judgment than in times when many are forthcoming. Bad fish are more likely to be taken home when fish are scarce than when they are plentiful; for then the fisherman feels more free to make a rigid selection. I say nothing about the severity or laxity of a church in receiving members, but it is incidental to human nature that when we are in a revival we become more guarded, and in dull times we are more apt to look at a convert with a hope which is rather eager than anxious. Thus I account for what I believe to be a fact, that rare converts are frequently bare converts; and that the best sheep come to us in flocks.

Dr. Judson, the devoted missionary to Burmah, during his visit to Boston, was asked, "Do you think the prospect bright of the speedy conversion of the heathen?" "As bright," he replied, "as the promises of God."

Monday, December 22, 1800.—Creesturo, Gokol and his wife, and Felix Carey gave us their experience to-night. Brother C. concluded in prayer after we had sung, "Salvation, oh, the joyful sound!" . . . Brother Thomas is almost mad with joy.—*Diary of the Rev. W. Ward, of Serampore.*

"I am inclined to think that a single soul is never born again, apart from the tender concern and anxiety of some creaturely heart or hearts. . . . Probably Saul was converted in answer to the prayers of the disciples at Damascus.—*John Pulsford.*

Dr. Isaac Barrow, when a lad was most unpromising. Such was his misconduct, and so irreclaimable did he seem, that his father, in despair, used to say that "if it pleased God to remove any of his children, he wished it might be his son Isaac." What became of the other and more hopeful children of the worthy linen-draper, we cannot tell; but this unworthy son lived to be the happiness and pride of his father's old age, to be one of the most illustrious members of the university to which he belonged, and one of the brightest ornaments of the church of which he became a minister.

LXXIX.

"WHEREFORE, WHEN I CAME, WAS THERE NO MAN? WHEN I CALLED, WAS THERE NONE TO ANSWER? IS MY HAND SHORTENED AT ALL, THAT IT CANNOT REDEEM? OR HAVE I NO POWER TO DELIVER? BEHOLD, AT MY REBUKE I DRY UP THE SEA, I MAKE THE RIVERS A WILDERNESS: THEIR FISH STINKETH, BECAUSE THERE IS NO WATER, AND DIETH FOR THIRST.

"I CLOTHE THE HEAVENS WITH BLACKNESS, AND I MAKE SACKCLOTH THEIR COVERING.

"THE LORD GOD HATH GIVEN ME THE TONGUE OF THE LEARNED, THAT I SHOULD KNOW HOW TO SPEAK A WORD IN SEASON TO HIM THAT IS WEARY: HE WAKENETH MORNING BY MORNING, HE WAKENETH MINE EAR TO HEAR AS THE LEARNED.

"THE LORD GOD HATH OPENED MINE EAR, AND I WAS NOT REBELLIOUS, NEITHER TURNED AWAY BACK.

'I GAVE MY BACK TO THE SMITERS, AND MY CHEEKS TO THEM THAT PLUCKED OFF THE HAIR: I HID NOT MY FACE FROM SHAME AND SPITTING."—*Isaiah* l. 2–6.

THERE was no one to take up the divine challenge: no one to answer for guilty man. To the call of God for one who could save, there was no answer but the echo of his voice.

See who it is that comes to rescue man! Jehovah interposes to save; but he appears in a special manner.

The Lord himself draws the portrait. View it with solemn attention

I. BEHOLD THE MESSIAH AS GOD!

1. He comes in fulness of power. "Is my hand shortened at all?"
2. His power to save is equal to that with which he destroys. Let Egypt be the instance: "I dry up the sea," etc.
3. His power is that which produces the phenomena of nature. "I clothe the heavens with blackness."
4. This should excite deep gratitude, that he who rebukes the sea was himself rebuked; he who clothes the heavens with blackness was himself in darkness for our sake.
5. This should excite confidence; for he is evidently Lord of the sea and the sky, the dark and the gloom.

II. BEHOLD HIM AS THE APPOINTED TEACHER!

1. Instructed and endowed: "the Lord hath given me the tongue of the learned." He knows, and he imparts knowledge.
2. Condescending to the needy: "to him that is weary."
3. Watchful of each case: "that I should know how to speak a word in season." This is a rare gift: many speak, and perhaps speak in season, but have not learned the right manner.
4. Constantly in communion with God: "he wakeneth morning by morning." "He that hath sent me is with me."

Should we not be heartily attentive to his teachings? "I will hear what God the Lord will speak."

III. BEHOLD HIM AS THE SERVANT OF THE LORD!

1. Prepared by grace: "he wakeneth mine ear to hear." He spoke not his own words, but those which he had heard of his Father.
2. Consecrated in due form: "hath opened mine ear," boring it to the door-post. This was publicly done in his baptism, when in outward symbol he fulfilled all righteousness.
3. Obedient in all things: "I was not rebellious." In no point did Jesus refuse the Father's will, not even in Gethsemane.
4. Persevering through all trials: "neither turned away back." He did not relinquish the hard task, but set his face as a flint to carry it through.
5. Courageous in it all: as we see in the verse following our text.

What a model for our service! Consider him, and copy him.

IV. BEHOLD HIM AS THE PEERLESS SUFFERER!

1. His entire submission; his back, his cheeks, his hair, his face.
2. His willing submission: "I *gave* my back to the smiters." "I hid not my face."
3. His lowly submission, bearing the felon's scourge, and the utmost of scorn: "shame and spitting."

4. His patient submission. Not a word of reproach, or resentment.

Grace had taught him effectually, and he suffered perfectly.

It may bring out important truths very vividly if we make combinations of the four subjects which have come before us.

Place the first and the last together: *the God and the Sufferer.* What condescension! what ability to save!

Place the two middle terms together: *the Teacher and the Servant*, and see how sweetly he serves by teaching, and teaches by serving.

Put all together, and let the blended characters ensure ardent affection, obedient reverence, and devout delight.

A Golden Lecturer's Word.

I imagine myself placed in the world at the time when the Christ was expected, commissioned to announce to it that God was about to send his own Son, having endowed him with the "tongue of the learned." What excitement in all the schools of philosophy! What gatherings of the sages of the earth! What expectations of the discoveries with which science was about to be enriched! "Now," say they, "shall long-hidden secrets be revealed: now shall we penetrate the laboratories of nature,

and observe all those processes of which, at present, we see only the results. For what purpose can the tongue of the learned have been given to a Divine Person, if not that he may expound mysteries to the world, that he may tell us what the wise have been unable to detect, and the studious labored in vain to unfold?

But this Divine person shall speak for himself to the assembled throng of philosophers and sages. "Yes, the Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned; and I have descended that I might speak with that tongue to every nation of the earth. But he hath not given me the tongue that I might tell how stars and planets roll, or settle the disputes of the wise. He hath not given me the tongue that I should know how to speak a word to you, ye disputers of this world; but simply that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. Oh, how fallen are the expectant countenances of philosophers and sages! "Is this all?" they exclaim. "Was it only for this that the tongue of the learned was bestowed? Does this require, or can this employ, the tongue of the learned?"

Nay, men of science, turn not angrily away. With all your wisdom you have never been able to do this. The weary have sought to you in vain. They have found no "word in season," no word of comfort and sustainment; and why then should you be indignant at the province here assigned to "the tongue of the learned?"

What tongue but "the tongue of the learned"

could speak "a word in season" to a world oppressed with this universal weariness? The tongue must be one which could disclose the mysteries of the Godhead, prove the immortality of the soul, and be charged with intelligence as to the pardon of sin, and the mode of reconciliation between man and his maker: things into which angels had in vain striven to look.—*Condensed from Henry Melvill.*

LXXX.

"FOR THE LORD GOD WILL HELP ME; THEREFORE SHALL I NOT BE CONFOUNDED: THEREFORE HAVE I SET MY FACE LIKE A FLINT, AND I KNOW THAT I SHALL NOT BE ASHAMED.—*Isaiah* l. 7.

THERE was no flint in the heart of Jesus, but there was much in his face. He was as resolute as he was submissive. Read verse 6 and this verse together—"I hid not my face from shame and spitting . . . I have set my face like a flint." Gentleness and resolve are married.

In Luke ix. 51, we read, "he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." In our Lord there was no turning aside, though none helped him, and every one hindered him. He was neither confounded by thoughts within his own soul, nor rendered ashamed by the scorn of others.

Let us consider our Lord's stern resolution, thus,—

I. HIS STEADFAST RESOLVE TESTED.

He declared his determination in the language of our text, and by many an ordeal this declaration was justified. He was tried—

1. By the offers of the world. They would make him a king. His triumphant ride into Jeru-

salem proved how easily he could have become a popular leader. By a little compromise he might have won an enthusiastic following as a religious teacher.

2. By the persuasions of friends. Peter rebuked him. All the disciples marvelled at his determination. His relatives sought a very different career for him. Many yield to well-meaning friends; but Jesus set his face like a flint.

3. By the unworthiness of his clients.
   He that ate bread with him betrayed him.
   His disciples forsook him and fled.
   The whole race conspired to put him to death.

4. By the bitterness which he tasted at his entrance upon his great work as a substitutionary sacrifice. Gethsemane, the betrayal, the false accusation, the mockery: these were sharp commencements, and many have shrunk when the fire has begun to kindle upon them; but Jesus stood firm.

5. By the ease with which he could have relinquished the enterprise.
   Pilate would have released him had Jesus pleaded.
   Legions of angels would have come to his rescue.
   He might himself have come down from the cross.
   He was not held to his work by inability to quit, but only by that love which is strong

as death. He said, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me:" the impossibility lay in his resolve to redeem his people.

6. By the taunts of those that scoffed.
   The people: "Let us see whether Elias will come to save him."
   The priests, &c.: "If he be the King of Israel," etc.
   The thieves: "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us."

Strong men have been overcome by ridicule; but not so Jesus.

7. By the full stress of the death-agony.
   The pain, thirst, fever, fainting, desertion, death: none of these moved him from his invincible resolve.

II. His steadfast resolve sustained.

As man, our Lord owed his glorious steadfastness to several things, and he gives us in the text two "therefores." It was due—

1. To his divine schooling. See verse 4.
2. To his conscious innocence. "I know that I shall not be ashamed." See verse 5.
3. To the joy that was set before him. He would overcome for his people. "Who will contend with me?" See verse 8.
4. Specially to his unshaken confidence in the help of the Lord God. We have this both in the text and in verse 9.

Even to his cry of "It is finished" he never flinched, but held to his grand purpose.

III. His steadfast resolve imitated.

1. Our purpose must be God's glory, as his was.
2. Our education must be God's teaching, as his was.
3. Our life must combine active and passive obedience, as his did. See verses 5 and 6.
4. Our strength must lie in God, as his did.
5. Our path must be one of faith, as his was. Note verse 10, and its remarkable connection with the whole subject.
6. Our resolve must be carefully made, and steadily carried out till we can say, "It is finished," in our manner and degree.

Close with a warning to the men of this world from verse 11.

The ungodly must have present light, from earth, from a fire of their own kindling, from mere momentary sparks.

Their resolve will end in eternal regrets; they shall lie down as for the night; their bed shall be sorrow; they shall never rise from it.

Addenda.

A secret divine support was rendered to the human nature of our Redeemer; for the great work in which he was engaged required abundant strength.

One has well said that "it would have broken the hearts, backs, and necks of all the glorious angels in heaven, and all the mighty men upon earth, had they engaged in it." Upon the Father's aid the Lord Jesus relied, according to our text; and this enabled him to contemplate the tremendous woes of the passion with a resolve of the most steadfast kind. Faith in God is the best foundation for a firm resolution, and a firm resolution is the best preparative for a great undertaking. There is nothing so hard but that it can be cut by that which is harder: against his hard labor our Lord set his harder determination. His face was as a flint; you could not turn him to leave his work, nor melt him to pity himself. He was set upon it: he must die because he must save his people; and he must save his people because he loved them better than himself.

The saints endeavor to imitate the strong resolve of their Lord to yield themselves up. For instance, a Scottish peasant, dying as a martyr on the scaffold, said, "I came here to die for Christ, and if I had as many lives in my hand as I have hairs on my head, I would lay them all down for Christ."

Oh, what a sea of blood, a sea of wrath, of sin, of sorrow and misery, did the Lord Jesus wade through for your internal and eternal good! Christ did not plead, "This cross is too heavy for me to bear; this wrath is too great for me to lie under; this cup, which hath in it all the ingredients of divine displeasure, is too bitter for me to sup off, how much

more to drink the very dregs of it!" No, Christ stands not upon this; he pleads not the difficulty of the service, but resolutely and bravely wades through all, as the prophet shows. Christ makes nothing of his Father's wrath, the burden of your sins, the malice of Satan, and the rage of the world, but sweetly and triumphantly passes through all. Ah, souls, if this consideration will not raise up your spirits above all the discouragements that you meet with, to own Christ and his service, and to stick and cleave to Christ and his service, I am afraid nothing will! A soul not stirred by this, not raised and lifted up by this, to be resolute and brave in the service of God, notwithstanding all dangers and difficulties, is a soul left of God to much blindness and hardness.—*Thomas Brooks.*

LXXXI.

"WITH HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED."—*Isaiah* liii. 5.

WHAT a chapter! A Bible in miniature. The Gospel in its essence.

When our subject brings us near to the passion of our Lord, our feelings should be deeply solemn, our attention intensely earnest.

Hark, the scourge is falling! Forget everything but "*his stripes.*"

We have each one a part in the flagellation: we wounded him, for certain; is it as certain that "with his stripes *we are healed?*"

Observe with deep attention,—

I. THAT GOD HERE TREATS SIN AS A DISEASE.

Sin is a great deal more than a disease, it is a wilful crime; but the mercy of our God leads him to consider it under that aspect, in order that he may deal with it in grace.

1. It is not an essential part of man as he was created: it is abnormal, disturbing, and destructive.
2. It puts the faculties out of gear, and breaks the equilibrium of the life-forces, just as disease disturbs the bodily functions.

3. It weakens the moral energy, as disease weakens the body.
4. It either causes pain, or deadens sensibility, as the case may be.
5. It frequently produces visible pollution. Some sins are as defiling as the leprosy of old.
6. It tends to increase in the man, and it will prove fatal before long.

Sin is a disease which is hereditary, universal, contagious, defiling, incurable, mortal. No human physician can deal with it. Death, which ends all bodily pain, cannot cure this disease: it displays its utmost power in eternity, after the seal of perpetuity has been set upon it by the mandate: "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still."

II. THAT GOD HERE DECLARES THE REMEDY WHICH HE HAS PROVIDED.

Jesus is his Son, whom he freely delivered up for us all.

1. Behold the heavenly medicine: the stripes of Jesus in body and in soul. Singular surgery, the Healer is himself wounded, and this is the means of our cure!
2. Remember that these stripes were vicarious: he suffered in our stead.
3. Accept this atonement, and you are saved by it.

Prayer begs for the divine surgery.

Belief is the linen cloth which binds on the plaster.

Trust is the hand which secures it to the wound.

Repentance is the first symptom of healing.

4. Let nothing of your own interfere with the one medicine. You see the proper places of prayer, faith, and repentance; do not misuse them, and make them rivals of the "stripes." By the stripes of Jesus we are healed, and by these alone.

One remedy, and only one, is set forth by God. Why seek another?

III. THAT THIS DIVINE REMEDY IS IMMEDIATELY EFFECTIVE.

To the carnal mind it does not appear to touch the case.

But those of us who have believed in the stripes of Jesus are witnesses to the instant and perfect efficacy of the medicine, for we can speak from experience, since "We are healed."

1. Our conscience is healed of its smart: eased but not deadened.
2. Our heart is healed of its love of sin. We hate the evil which scourged our Well-Beloved.
3. Our life is healed of its rebellion. We are zealous of good works.
4. Our consciousness assures us that we are healed. We know it, and rejoice in it. None can dispute us out of it.

APPLICATION.

1. Friend, *you are by nature in need of healing.*
   You do not think so: this disease affects the mind, and breeds delusions.
   You ridicule such teaching: your disease leads to madness.
   You oppose it. Thus do the sick refuse medicine, and the insane hate their friends.
2. Friend, *you are either healed or sick.*
   Do you not know which is your condition?
   You ought to know. You may know.
3. *Why are you not healed?*
   There is power in the remedy, for *you*, for you *now*.
4. *If you are healed, behave accordingly.*
   Quit diseased company.
   Do a healthy man's work.
   Praise the Physician, and his singular surgery.
   Publish abroad his praises.

SUGGESTIVE PARAGRAPHS.

The Balsam-tree sheds its balm to heal the wounds of those that cut it; and did not our blessed Saviour do the like? They mock him, and he prays for them; they shed his blood, and he makes it a medicine for their healing; they pierce his heart, and he opens therein a fountain for their sin and uncleanness. Was it ever heard, before or since, that a physician should bleed, and thus heal his patient:

or that an offended prince should die to expiate the treasons of his rebellious subjects?

Our heavenly Balsam is a cure for all diseases. If you complain that no sins are like yours, remember that there is no salvation like Christ's. If you have run the complete round of sin, remember that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all*. No man ever perished for being a great sinner, unless he was also an unbelieving sinner. Never did a patient fail of a cure who accepted from the great Physician the balm of his atoning blood.

See how Christ, whose death was so bitter to himself, becomes sweetness itself to us. Rejection was his, but acceptance is ours; the wounding was his, but the healing is ours; the blood was his, but the balm is ours; the thorns were his, but the crown is ours; the death was his, but the life is ours; the price was his, but the purchase is ours. There is more power in Christ's blood to save than in your sin to destroy. Do but believe in the Lord Jesus, and thy cure is wrought.—*Modernized from Spurstow's "Spiritual Chymist."*

The Hebrew word here, and the Greek word the Apostle Peter uses in his quotation of this passage which we render "stripes" (1 Pet. ii. 24), denote properly the marks which stripes or wounds leave upon the body, or as we say, *scars*. The scars in his hands, feet, and side, and perhaps other marks of his many wounds, remained after his resurrection. And John saw him, in vision, before the throne, as

"a Lamb as it had been slain." All these expressions and representations, I apprehend, are designed to intimate to us that, though the death of the Messiah is an event long since past, yet the effects and benefits are ever new, and to the eye of faith are ever present. How admirable is this expedient, that the wounds of one, yea of millions, should be healed by beholding the wounds of another! Yet this is the language of the gospel,—"Look, and live!" "Look unto me, and be ye saved!" Three great wounds are ours, guilt, sin, and sorrow; but by contemplating his weals, or scars, with an enlightened eye, and by rightly understanding who was thus wounded, and why, all these wounds are healed.

You who live by this medicine, speak well of it. Tell to others, as you have opportunity, what a Saviour you have found. It is usual for those who have been relieved, in dangerous and complicated diseases, by a skilful physician, to commend him to others, who are laboring under the like maladies, We often see public acknowledgments to this purpose. If all the persons who have felt the efficacy of a dying Saviour's wounds, apprehended by faith, were to publish their cases, how greatly would his power and grace be displayed!—*John Newton.*

He cures the *mind* of its blindness, the *heart* of its hardness, the *nature* of its perverseness, the *will* of its backwardness, the *memory* of its slipperiness, the *conscience* of its benumbness, and the *affections* of

their disorder, all according to his gracious promises: Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.—*John Willison.*

Trajan, it is said, rent his clothes to bind up his soldiers' wounds. Christ poured out his blood to heal his saints' wounds, and tears his flesh to bind them up.—*Gurnall.*

Dr. Cheyne was an eminent as well as a pious physician; but he was supposed to be severe in his regimen. When he had prescribed, and the patient began to object to the treatment, he would say, "I see you are not bad enough for me yet." Some are not bad enough for Christ yet—we mean in their own apprehension; but when they find and feel that they are entirely lost, and have no other help or hope, they will cordially acquiesce in his recommendations, however mysterious, however humbling, however trying.—*Jay.*

Four travellers, not very well acquainted with the cross-road over which they were journeying, began to look out for a finger-post. Soon after this, one of them cried out, "I think I can see one yonder in the distance;" and "I believe that I can see it too, about half a mile off," rejoined another, and "I am almost certain that I can see it," added a third, "it stands up higher than the hedges." "Well, well," said the fourth, "you may be right, or you may be wrong; but we had better make the best of our way to it, for while we keep at such a distance, whether it be a finger-post or not, it will be of little use to us."

Now I want you all to draw near to the Saviour of sinners, and not be satisfied with "thinking," or "believing," or "being almost certain," that he is your Redeemer; I want you to see him as your Saviour, as distinctly as you can see the sun in the skies, and to break out with all the conviction and fervency of Thomas, the Apostle, "My Lord, and my God."—*George Mogridge.*

LXXXII.

"FOR A SMALL MOMENT HAVE I FORSAKEN THEE; BUT WITH GREAT MERCIES WILL I GATHER THEE.

"IN A LITTLE WRATH I HID MY FACE FROM THEE FOR A MOMENT; BUT WITH EVERLASTING KINDNESS WILL I HAVE MERCY ON THEE, SAITH THE LORD THY REDEEMER.

"FOR THIS IS AS THE WATERS OF NOAH UNTO ME: FOR AS I HAVE SWORN THAT THE WATERS OF NOAH SHOULD NO MORE GO OVER THE EARTH; SO HAVE I SWORN THAT I WOULD NOT BE WROTH WITH THEE, NOR REBUKE THEE."—*Isaiah* liv. 7–9.

THIS text is the property of all believers. Their title to it is seen at the end of the chapter (verse 17). Let them not fail to enjoy it. It follows upon the prophecy of their Lord's great griefs. (Isaiah liii). We are never so able to believe a great promise as when we have been at the cross.

The people of God are often greatly tried, and their griefs are sometimes spiritual, and more deep than those of the wicked.

Their grand comfort lies in this, that in all their afflictions there is no penal wrath, no great indignation, no final judgment from the Lord.

We shall speak upon,—

I. THE LITTLE WRATH, AND ITS MODIFICATIONS.

The Lord calls it "a little wrath, and speaks of

the time of its continuance as "a moment," "a small moment."

1. Our view of it differs from the Lord's. To us it appears to be an utter forsaking, and the hiding of his face for ever.
   We are too foolish, too agitated, too unbelieving, to judge aright.
   God's view is truth itself, therefore let us believe it.
2. The time of it is short. What is less than "a small moment?"
   As compared with eternal love.
   When looked back upon in after years of holy peace.
   In reality it only endures for a little while.
   It will soon be over if we repent and pray.
3. The recompense is great. Jehovah vows to give "mercies," many, divine, everlasting, great, effectual: "with great mercies will I gather thee."
4. The wrath itself is little. A Husband's wrath, a Redeemer's wrath; a Pitier's wrath; wrath occasioned by holy love.
5. The expression of it is not severe.
   Not set my face against thee; nor change my mind.
   But hide my face, and that only for a moment.
   Thus God views the matter of our chastisement, seeing the end from the beginning.
6. It is quite consistent with eternal love. This

love will endure for ever, is present during the little wrath, is the cause of the wrath, and will continue unchanged for ever.

The chastened child is none the less loved.

7. It does not change our relationship to the Lord. He is still our Redeemer (verse 8), and we are still the redeemed of the Lord.

Our duty is to grieve because of the Lord's anger; to be humbled and sanctified by it; but not to faint, or despair under it.

II. THE GREAT WRATH, AND OUR SECURITY AGAINST IT.

1. The wrath of God against his people can no more break out upon them than can Noah's flood return to go over the earth. That flood has not returned during these many centuries, and it never will. Seed-time and harvest continue, and the bow is in the cloud. We have no dread of another universal deluge of water, nor need believers fear a return of divine wrath. (Enlarge on verse 9.)
2. The great flood of wrath has broken forth once for all. On our Lord it has burst, and thus it has been ended for ever. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us:" Gal. iii. 13. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us:" Ps. ciii. 12. "Who is he that con-

demneth? It is Christ that died:" Rom. viii. 34. "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none: and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found:" Jer. l. 20. This is real, true, effectual, eternal atonement.

3. We have the oath of God that it shall not return: "so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." In a way of punishment there shall not even be a hard word uttered—"nor rebuke thee."
4. We have a covenant of peace as sure as that made with Noah, and of a higher order, for it is made with Jesus our Lord.
5. We have pledges of immutable, immovable mercy: "the mountains and the hills:" verse 10. These may depart and be removed, but never the kindness of the Lord.
6. All this is spoken to us by Jehovah the Merciful: "saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

How wicked it is to doubt and distrust!

How safe is the condition of the covenanted ones!

How glorious is our God of everlasting kindness!

How careful we should be that we do not grieve him!

Cheering Words.

Ah, Sion's daughters! do not feare
The crosse, the cords, the nailes, the speare,
The myrrhe, the gall, the vinegar;

For Christ, your loving Saviour, hath
Drunk up the wine of God's fierce wrath,
Only there's left a little froth,

Less for to taste, than for to shew
What bitter cups had been your due,
Had he not drunk them up for you.—*Herrick.*

The darkness of sorrow has often been shown to be "the shadow of God's wing as he drew near to bless."

We cannot have fertilizing showers on the earth without a clouded heaven above. It is thus with our trials.

O Lord! let me have anything but thy frown; and anything with thy smile.—*R. Cecil.*

A learned minister, attending an aged Christian in humble life, when in his last illness, remarked that the passage in Hebrews xiii. 5, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," was much more emphatic in the original language than in our translation, inasmuch as it contained no fewer than five negatives in proof of the validity of the divine promise, and not merely two, as it appears in the English version; intending by this remark, to convey to him that, in consequence of the number of negatives, the promise was expressed with much greater force in the original language than in the English. The man's reply was very simple and striking: "I have no doubt, sir, that you are quite right, but I can assure you that if God had only spoken *once*, I should have believed him just the same."

LXXXIII.

"LET THE WICKED FORSAKE HIS WAY, AND THE UNRIGHTEOUS MAN HIS THOUGHTS: AND LET HIM RETURN UNTO THE LORD, AND HE WILL HAVE MERCY UPON HIM.—*Isaiah* lv. 7

THIS is the great chapter of gospel invitation. How free! How full! How plain and pressing are the calls to receive grace!

Yet the necessity of repentance in its most practical form, is not cast into the background. Turning, or conversion, is insisted on.

Gospel provisions are presented freely (verses 1 and 2).

A Saviour is provided and proclaimed (verses 3 and 4).

Saved nations are absolutely promised to him (verse 5).

Men are encouraged to seek and find the Lord (verse 6).

But the call to conversion follows close after, and is intended to be the necessary inference from all that preceded it. Men *must* return to God: His very mercy makes it imperative.

Very earnestly, therefore, let us turn our thoughts to,—

I. THE NECESSITY OF CONVERSION.

The text makes this clear, but it may also be inferred from—

1. The nature of God. How can a holy God wink at sin, and pardon sinners who continue in their wickedness?
2. The nature of the gospel. It is not a proclamation of tolerance for sin, but of deliverance from it. It contains no single promise of forgiveness to the man who goes on in his iniquity.
3. The facts of the past. No instance has occurred of pardon given to a man while obstinately persisting in his evil way. Conversion always goes with salvation.
4. The needs of society. It would be unsafe to the common weal of the universe to show mercy to the incorrigible offender. Sin must be punished, or else virtue will perish.
5. The well-being of the sinner himself requires that he should quit his sin, or feel its penalty. To be favored with a sense of divine pardon, while obstinately abiding in sin, would confirm the man in sin; and sin itself is a worse evil than its penalty.
6. The work of the Holy Spirit would be set aside, for he is the Sanctifier.
7. The design of our Lord Jesus would be overborne, for he comes to save *from* sin.
8. The character of heaven requires that a sinner's nature be renewed, and his life purged, ere

he can enter the holy place where God, and holy angels, and perfect saints abide.

"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven:" Matt. xviii. 3.

II. THE NATURE OF CONVERSION.

1. It deals with the life and conduct. The man's "way."

His natural way; that into which he runs when left to himself.

His habitual way; to which he is accustomed.

His beloved way; wherein his pleasures lie.

The general way; the broad road in which the many run.

This, our text says, he must "forsake." He must have done with sin, or he will be undone. It will not suffice for him to—

Own that it is wrong;

Profess to be sorry for following it;

Resolve to leave it, and end in resolve, or

Move more cautiously in it.

No, he must forsake it, altogether, at once, and for ever.

2. It deals with the "thoughts." A man must forsake—

His unscriptural opinions, and self-formed notions—

About God, his law, his gospel, his people.

About sin, punishment, Christ, self, &c.

His contemplations, so far as they lead him—
To find pleasure in evil;
To indulge in conceit and self-sufficiency;
or,
To harbor wrong thoughts of God.

His evil resolves:—
To continue in sin, to delay repentance, to be a free-thinker, to be his own master, to defy God, &c.

Such thoughts are to be forsaken; he must flee from them.

3. It deals with the man in reference to God. "Let him return *unto the Lord*."
It bids him cease from pride, neglect, opposition, distrust, disobedience, and all other forms of alienation from the Lord. He must turn and return: wandering no further, but coming home.

III. THE GOSPEL OF CONVERSION.

1. A sure promise is made to it. "He will have mercy upon him."
2. Divine power is exercised to effect it. "Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned:" Lam. v. 21. A man converts when grace converts him.
3. It is itself promised to faith in Jesus. Acts v. 31; xiii. 38, 39.
4. The pardon which comes with it is the result of a full atonement, which renders the pardon

abundant, just, safe, and easy of belief to the awakened conscience.

Oh, that the sinner would consider the need of a total change of *thought* within, and *way* without! It must be thorough and radical or it will be useless.

Total and terrible ruin must ensue if you continue in evil.

May this hour see the turning-point in your life's course! God saith, "Let him return." What doth hinder you?

A Story.

William Burns was preaching one evening in the open air, to a vast multitude. He had just finished, when a man came timidly up to him, and said, "O Sir! will you come and see my dying wife?" Burns consented; but the man immediately said, "Oh! I am afraid when you know where she is you won't come." "I will go wherever she is," he replied. The man then tremblingly told him that he was the keeper of the lowest public-house in one of the most wretched districts of the town. "It does not matter," said the missionary, "come away." As they went, the man, looking up in the face of God's servant, said earnestly, "O Sir! I am going to give it up at the *term*." Burns replied, "There are no *terms* with God." However much the poor trembling publican tried to get Burns to converse with him about the state of his soul, and the way of salva-

tion, he was unable to draw another word from him than these—"There are no *terms* with God." The shop was at last reached. They passed through it in order to reach the chamber of death. After a little conversation with the dying woman, the servant of the Lord engaged in prayer, and while he was praying the publican left the room, and soon a loud noise was heard, something like a rapid succession of determined knocks with a great hammer. Was this not a most unseemly noise to make on such a solemn occasion as this? Is the man mad? No. When Burns reached the street, he beheld the wreck of the publican's sign-board strewn in splinters upon the pavement. The business was given up for good and all. The man had in earnest turned his back on his low public-house, and returned to the Lord, who had mercy upon him, and unto our God, who abundantly pardoned all his sins. Nothing transpired in his after-life to discredit the reality of his conversion.—*William Brown, in "Joyful Sound."*

LXXXIV.

"LET HIM RETURN UNTO THE LORD, AND HE WILL HAVE MERCY UPON HIM; AND TO OUR GOD, FOR HE WILL ABUNDANTLY PARDON.—*Isaiah* lv. 7.

THE prophet is setting forth the mission of Jesus (verses 4 and 5).

Straightway he makes an appeal to sinners, for Jesus comes to sinners. He proclaims pardon to them, for this Jesus brings: his coming is as the morning, bedewing the earth with delight.

The call is practically to faith and repentance; immediate, frank, spiritual, complete.

The inducement presented is an abundant free-grace pardon: "he will abundantly pardon."

There is no more likely argument wherewith to persuade souls.

I. LET US CONTEMPLATE THE ABUNDANCE OF DIVINE PARDON.

We may do so the better if we consider,—

1. The abundance of the attribute from which it springs. All the attributes of God are infinite and harmonious, but we are told that "God is love," and this is not said of justice, or power. "Thy mercy is great above the heavens:" Ps. cviii. 4. "The earth,

O Lord, is full of thy mercy:" Ps. cxix. 64. "His mercy endureth forever." Ps. cxxxvi.

2. The abundance of the objects of the pardon. Since the days of Adam and even until now God has pardoned multitudes among all nations, classes, and ages.

We quickly lose patience when many offend, but it is not so with our God. "Thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now:" Num. xiv. 19.

3 The abundant sins which are pardoned. Who can count the thoughts, words, and deeds which are pardoned!

These repeated *ad nauseam*. Is. xliii. 24 Rev. iii. 16.

Sins against law and gospel, light and love, in youth and old age.

Yet these God removes, like the countless locusts blown away by the wind, or as the drops of dew exhaled by the sun.

4. The abundant sin of the sins which are pardoned.

Some sins are planned and deliberated on, and each plotting and devising entails sin.

Some are a spider's nest, swarming with many sins.

Some are proud, wanton, cruel, blasphemous, impudent.

Some are repeated, aggravated, and persisted in.

Yet the intensified venom of epitomized sin the Lord removes.

5. The abundant means of pardon.
   The atonement of his Son, and his righteousness.
   The infinite merit of the ever-living Advocate.
   The Holy Spirit ever present to apply gospel provisions.
6. The abundant ease of the terms of pardon.
   No hard conditions of penance or purgatory.
   Only ask and have; repent and trust.
   Even the repentance and faith required are also given.
7. The abundant fullness of the pardon.
   It covers all sin, past, present, and to come.
   It is most effectual, and sure.
   It is perpetual, and irreversible.
   It is accompanied with imputed righteousness. Pardon washes, and justification clothes and beautifies.
8. The abundant blessings which attend it.
   Liberation from spiritual prison, legal bonds, &c.
   Freedom from the reigning power of inbred sin.
   Adoption into the heavenly family.
   Acceptance so full that we may challenge accusers.
   Employment in services of trust.
   Communion with the thrice-holy God.
   Reception of answers to our prayers, as true and certain as if we were perfectly pure.
   Ultimate admission into glory itself with the perfect ones.

II. LET US CONSIDER ITS PROPER INFERENCES: and these shall furnish the practical conclusion of our discourse.

1. Then there is no room for despair. If the Lord only pardoned now and then, it were well to seek his favor even on the bare chance of obtaining it; but now let us return unto him in sure and certain hope of pardon.
2. Then there is a loud call to repent, for who would offend so good, so kind a lord? Let our relentings be kindled, since he is so forward to promise us pardon.
3. Here is a special call to the greatest sinners, since abundant mercy is most appropriate to their case: and no less should the less guilty come, since there must be room for *them*.
4. Such a much-forgiving God deserves to be much loved, and the lives of the pardoned should prove that to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much.
5. If such mercy be slighted, we may be sure it will entail great wrath.

INVITING SOUNDS.

That sin which is not too great to be forsaken, is not too great to be forgiven.

Mercy in us, it is no more than a drop; but in God it is an ocean; in us it is no more than a little stream; in God it is a springing and flowing fountain. A

spring continually runs, an ocean is never drawn dry. What is a little sparkle of fire, if it fall into the main sea? The same are the sins of a penitent person when dealt with by the mercy of God.—*Thomas Horton.*

One of the captive followers of the Duke of Monmouth was brought before James the Second. "You know it is in my power," said the king, "to pardon you." "Yes," said the man, who well knew his cruel character, "but it is not in your nature." However unwise this answer was, its truth was soon seen. Happily, we know that God has not only the power but the disposition to show mercy. Also, unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy."

Mr. Fleming, in his "Fulfilling of the Scriptures," relates the case of a most hardened sinner who was put to death in the town of Ayr. It pleased the Lord to bring him to repentance when in prison, and so full was his assurance of pardoning mercy that, when he came to the place of execution, he could not help crying out to the people, under the sense of pardon, "Oh, he is a great Forgiver! He is a great Forgiver!" and he added, "Now hath perfect love cast out fear. I know God hath nothing to say against me, for Jesus Christ hath paid all; and those are free whom the Son makes free."—*G. S. Bowes.*

Lord, before I commit a sin, it seems to me so shallow that I may wade through it dry-shod from any guiltiness; but when I have committed it, it

often seems so deep that I cannot escape without drowning. Thus I am always in extremities: either my sins are so small that they need not any repentance, or so great that they cannot obtain thy pardon. Lend me, O Lord, a reed out of thy sanctuary, truly to measure the dimension of my offences. But O! as thou revealest to me more of my misery, reveal also more of thy mercy; lest, if my wounds, in my apprehension, gape wider than thy tents (plugs of lint), my soul run out at them. If my badness seem bigger than thy goodness but one hair's breadth, but one moment, that is room and time enough for me to run to eternal despair.—*Thomas Fuller.*

LXXXV.

"WHO ARE THESE THAT FLY AS A CLOUD, AND AS THE DOVES TO THEIR WINDOWS?"—*Isaiah* lx. 8.

IN the days when the Lord shall visit his church, multitudes will come to seek him.

It is a great blessing when they do so: a matter for admiring praise.

They will come from far to learn of Jesus, flying in a straight line, as pigeons when they return to their homes.

Jesus is the great attraction, and when he is faithfully lifted up, men will hasten to him in flocks, flying like clouds before a gale.

Yet will it astonish those who see it, and they will ask questions such as those which follow.

I. WHO ARE THESE CONVERTS THAT THEY SHOULD BE SO MANY? "As a cloud."

The answers are many and easy.

1. Are not sinners many?
2. Is not Christ's redemption great?
3. Are not his blessings attractive?
4. Shall Satan have the pre-eminence in numbers at the last? We cannot think it will be so.
5. Is not the Spirit of God able to draw many?

6. Is not heaven great, and is there not room for hosts of souls?

Naturalists tell us of vast clouds of pigeons in America. Oh, to see such a cloud of converts?

II. WHO ARE THEY THAT THEY SHOULD FLY?

Why are they in such eager haste as to speed like doves when coming homeward to their cotes?

This also is plain.

1. They are in great danger.
2. Their time is very short.
3. They are driven by a great wind. The Spirit, like a heavenly breath, impels souls to seek salvation.
4. They are moved by strong desire: a great hunger is on them to reach their home, where they shall be fed and housed.

Doves fly straight, swiftly, surely. They neither linger nor loiter, but hasten home.

III. WHO ARE THEY THAT THEY SHOULD FLY TOGETHER?

They fly in such a flock that they appear like a cloud: why is this?

1. They are all in one common danger.
2. They have no time to quarrel while seeking safety.
3. They have one common object: they seek one Saviour.
4. They are wafted by the same heavenly wind.

The Spirit works in each according to his own will.

5. They find comfort in each other's society.
6. They hope to live together forever above.

IV. WHO ARE THEY THAT THEY SHOULD FLY THIS WAY?

They are doves, and so they come to their usual abodes in the clefts of the rock, or to the openings of the dove-house.

1. Seeking safety in Jesus, from the hawks which pursue them.
2. Desiring rest in his love, for they are wearied, and find no other rest for the soles of their feet.
3. Finding a home in his heart. Swallows go to another home in winter, but saints abide in Christ for ever.
4. Their companions are there: doves congregate, and so do saved sinners love fellowship with each other.
5. Their young are there. "The swallow hath found a nest for herself, where she may lay her young:" Ps. lxxxiv. 3. Believers love to have their children housed in Christ.
6. Their food is there. Where else can we find provender?
7. Their all is there. Christ is all.

V. BUT WHO ARE THEY INDIVIDUALLY?

1. Some are our own children.

2. Some are from the Sabbath-school.
3. Some are old hearers, who were gospel-hardened.
4. Some are quite strangers, outsiders.
5. Some are backsliders returning.
6. Some are those whom we sought in prayer, and personal address.

Dear hearer, are you one of them?

Have you not reason to fly from the wrath to come?

Fly first to Jesus, and then without delay hasten to his church.

Feathers.

This text has been well illustrated by *Morier*. "In the environs of the city (Ispahan), to the westward, near Zainderood, are many pigeon-houses, erected at a distance from habitations. They are large, round towers, rather broader at the bottom than at the top, and crowned by conical spiracles, through which the pigeons descend. The interior resembles a honey-comb, pierced with a thousand holes, each of which forms a snug retreat for a nest. The extraordinary flights of pigeons, which I have seen upon one of these buildings, afford perhaps a good illustration of the passage. The great numbers, and the compactness of the mass, literally looked like a cloud at a distance, and obscured the sun in their passage." What gives an additional value to this illustration is the probability that similar dove-houses were in use among the Hebrews, for they certainly were so

among their Egyptian neighbors.—*Kitto's Pictorial Bible.*

God's children love communion and fellowship one with another, that they may mutually be comforted and edified in faith: "they fly like a cloud, and as doves to their windows;" that is, to the house or church of God.—*Benjamin Keach.*

Those that are weak want supply and support from others. Nature teacheth this lesson. The weakest creatures amongst fish, or fowls, or beasts, go usually in flocks and companies.—*G. Swinnock.*

Birds of a feather flock together.

Everybody knows that large flocks of pigeons assemble at the stroke of the great clock in the square of St. Mark, Venice. Believe me, it is not the music of the bell which attracts them, they can hear that every hour. They come, Mr. Preacher, for food, and no mere sound will long collect them. This is a hint for filling your meeting-house; it must be done not merely by that fine, bell-like voice of yours, but by all the neighborhood's being assured that spiritual food is to be had when you open your mouth. Barley for pigeons, good sir; and the gospel for men and women. Try it in earnest, and you cannot fail; you will soon be saying, "Who are they that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows?" —From "*Feathers for Arrows*," *by C. H. Spurgeon.*

A writer in "Nature" states that the small birds,

that are unable to fly the three hundred and fifty miles across the Mediterranean Sea, are carried over on the backs of cranes. When the first cold weather comes, the cranes fly low, making a peculiar cry. Little birds of every species fly up to them, while the twittering of those already settled may be distinctly heard. But for this provision, many species of small birds would become extinct. So, many converts that are young and feeble need much assistance in seeking Christ. Let those that are strong help the weaker ones in their spiritual flight.

LXXXVI.

"Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord.
"Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord.
"Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings."—*Jeremiah* iii. 12, 14, 22.

IT is a fearful thing that a believer should backslide.

Such mercy has been shown to him.
Such love has been enjoyed by him.
Such prospects lie before him.
Such comfort is sacrificed by his backsliding.

It is a wretched business for the man himself, since by it nothing is gained, and everything is endangered.

It is injurious to the whole church to which the backslider belongs.

It is mischievous to the outside world.

What is the immediate duty of the backslider? the immediate remedy for his backsliding?

One word sums it up, and it is God's word, "*Return.*"

Let us earnestly note,—

I. Wonder awakened by the call.

There would seem to be many reasons why the Lord should not invite the backslider to return. We

will follow the guidance of the chapter, which will richly repay a careful exposition.

1. The usual jealousy of love. Note the terrible imagery of verse 1. A wanton adulteress is allowed to return to her husband.
2. The abundance of the sin: "Thou hast polluted the land" (verse 2). The very earth felt the leprosy of the idolatry.
3. The obstinate continuance in evil, notwithstanding chastisements (verse 3).
4. The refusal of tender persuasion. "Wilt thou not?" etc. (verse 4.)
5. The perversion of mercy. God did not reserve his anger for ever, and they sinned the more because of his long-suffering (verse 5).
6. The warnings which had been despised. Judah saw Israel doomed, and yet followed her evil ways (verses 6—11). It is a great increase of iniquity when we perceive the suffering which it causes others, and yet persevere in it ourselves.

Is it not marvellous that God should be so full of mercy as to bid such revolters return, and repeat the exhortation again and again?

II. MEMORIES AROUSED BY THE CALL.

Does it not remind you of other days?

1. When you first came to Jesus?
2. When you were happy with other believers.
3. When you could teach and warn others.
4. When you began to go aside, a little.

5. When you have sinned grievously through this backsliding.

Indulge these memories till they affect your heart.

III. Reasons urged for obeying the call.

1. It is God himself who utters it. Twice we read, "saith the Lord."
2. Anger will be removed: "I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you" (verse 12).
3. Love continues: "I am married unto you" (verse 14).
4. Healing will be given: "I will heal your backslidings" (verse 22).

Each verse yields its own forcible argument.

IV. Directions given to make obedience to the call easy.

1. "Only acknowledge thine iniquity" (verse 13). What a simple matter!
2. Lament the evil: "Weeping and supplications" (verse 21). Do you not mourn your sin even now?
3. Own the sad result. "We lie down in our shame," &c. (verse 25.)
4. Trust in God for restoration: "Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel" (verse 23).
5. Heartily renew allegiance: "Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God" (verse 22).

These things, carefully and immediately attended

to, will restore the fallen to their first estate. "Return! Return!" saith the Lord.

Oh, that the Holy Ghost may lead them to it!

V. PROMISES MADE TO THOSE ANSWERING TO THE CALL.

Such shall obtain—

1. Special guidance: "I will bring you to Zion" (verse 14).
2. Suitable food: "Feed you with knowledge' (verse 15).
3. Spiritual insight. (See verses 16 and 17.)
4. Childlike spirit: "Thou shalt call me, 'My father'" (verse 19).

The whole subject needs pressing upon all believers, for we may have already backslidden more than we are aware.

Upon the conscious backslider the three-fold call should be pressed, "Return!" "Turn!" "Return!"

TURNS OF EXPRESSION.

There is a play upon words, or rather upon senses, in the original, "Return, ye backsliding children," more literally, "Turn ye, turned-away sons, and I will heal your turnings," as in Hosea xiv. 4.

God invites and does not drive; he here exchanges threats for promises. God will "heal," not simply receive his children. God alone can heal their apostacies. Man repents of sin, but God cures it. It is our part to turn from evil, God's to destroy that

evil. Sin is washed out, not by tears of penitence, but by the blood of Christ. The healing is of the apostacies themselves, not simply of their painful effects. Christ saves from *sin.—The Pulpit Commentary.*

I was weary of a cold heart towards Christ, and his sacrifice, and the work of his Spirit—of a cold heart in the pulpit, in secret prayer, and in study. For fifteen years previously I had felt my heart burning within, as if going to Emmaus with Jesus. On a day ever to be remembered by me, as I was going from Dolgelly to Machynlleth, and climbing up towards Cadair Idris, I considered it to be incumbent upon me to pray, however hard I felt my heart, and however worldly the frame of my spirit was. Having begun in the name of Jesus, I soon felt as it were the fetters loosening, and the old hardness of heart softening, and, as I thought, mountains of frost and snow dissolving, and melting within me. This engendered confidence in my soul in the promise of the Holy Ghost. I felt my mind relieved from some great bondage: tears flowed copiously, and I was constrained to cry out for the gracious visits of God, by restoring to my soul the joy of his salvation.—*Christmas Evans.*

I am sometimes downright staggered at the exceeding riches of his grace. How Christ can go on pardoning day after day, and hour after hour; sometimes I feel almost afraid to ask, for shame.—*A. L. Newton.*

Man-like is it to fall into sin,
Fiend-like is it to dwell therein,
Christ-like is it for sin to grieve,
God-like is it all sin to leave.—*Longfellow.*

Yet sovereign mercy calls, "Return!"
Dear Lord, and may I come?
My vile ingratitude I mourn—
O take the wanderer home!—*Steele.*

LXXXVII.

"But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? and I said, Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me."—*Jeremiah* iii. 19.

Man thinks lightly of sin; but not so the Lord.
Man thinks lightly of grace; but not so the Lord.
Man trifles where God wonders.
Man forgets where God considers.

The text may be viewed as written with a note of interrogation (?), or a note of exclamation (!).

Let us treat it somewhat in that blended fashion.

I. Here is a difficult question.

Many knotty questions are involved in it.

1. As to the holy Lord. "How shall *I* put thee among the children?" How, in consistency with justice and purity, shall the Holy One place in his family persons of such character? They have forgotten, despised, forsaken, rejected, and insulted their God and can he treat them as if they had loved and obeyed?
2. As to the unholy person. "How shall I put

thee among the children?" Shalt thou be adopted after being—

A rebel so set on mischief, wilfully disobeying?

A sinner so open, so presumptuous, so obstinate?

A desperado so profligate, profane, and persecuting?

A criminal "condemned already" by thine unbelief?

Such persons do obtain mercy, but how is it done?

3. As to the family. "How shall I put thee *among the children?*"

What will the children say? "A fine brother, certainly!"

What will the world say? Will not observers exclaim,—"See what characters are received into the household of God!" May it not even seem like trifling with iniquity? May not the wicked hope for impunity in their sinning?

What can I myself say to justify such a course? How shall I make this appear to be the act of the Judge of all the earth?

4. As to the inheritance: "and give thee *a pleasant land, a goodly heritage?*" Is not this too good for such?

Shalt thou have peace and happiness below?

Shalt thou have all that my favored children enjoy?

Shalt thou be admitted into heaven?

It is a question which none but the Lord would ever have thought of.

He himself asked it long ago, as if to let us see that it was no small matter which he proposed.

He himself answered the question, or it had been unanswerable.

II. HERE IS A WONDERFUL ANSWER.

1. It is from God himself, and is therefore a perfect answer.
2. It is in the divine style: "Thou shalt;" and "thou shalt not." Omnipotence speaks, and grace reveals its unconditional character.
3. It is concerning a divine work. God himself puts sinners among his children, and none beside can do it.

   The Lord infuses a new spirit—a filial spirit.

   The spirit expresses itself by a new call: "My Father."

   This creates new bonds: "and shalt not turn away from me."
4. It is effectual for its purpose.

   Those who heartily cry "My Father" may safely be put among the children.

   Those who do not turn away from their father must be children. Servants go, but sons abide.

Thus the wisdom of our gracious God, by regeneration and adoption, answers the difficult question.

III. HERE, WITHOUT QUESTION, IS A MATCHLESS PRIVILEGE.

We are put among the children.

1. We are indeed made children of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.
2. We are as much loved as the children.
3. We are treated as the children.
   We are forgiven as a father forgives his children.
   We are clothed, fed, and housed as children.
   We are taught, ruled, and chastened as children.
   We are honored and enriched as children.
4. We are placed under filial obligations,—
   To love, honor, obey, and serve our Father.

This should be regarded as a high honor, and not as a burden.

Let us admire the grace which puts us into the family.

Let us enjoy the privileges which this secures to us.

Let us act as loving children should do.

EXTRACTS.

God seems, as it were, to be at a stand. "How shall I act so as to save these sinners, and yet not wrong myself?" This should greatly humble us for our sins. As if a child should do much evil, and bring himself into grievous troubles, so that if his tender father would help him he must be put to abundance

of difficulties, and is fain to beat his brains, and laboriously study how he shall contrive to save his poor, foolish child from utter undoing. Now, if the child has any ingenuousness in him, he will not think, "My father's anxiety is no great matter, so long as I am delivered;" but he will cry—"Alas, this will break my heart! What troubles have I brought my father into! I cannot bear to think of it?" It should be thus with us in reference to our God, who in this text speaketh after the manner of men.—*Jeremiah Burroughs.*

In the second century, Celsus, a celebrated adversary of Christianity, distorting our Lord's words, complained, "Jesus Christ came into the world to make the most horrible and dreadful society; for he calls sinners, and not the righteous; so that the body he came to assemble is a body of profligates, separated from good people, among whom they before were mixed. He has rejected all the good, and collected all the bad." "True," said Origen, in reply, "our Jesus came to call sinners—but to repentance. He assembled the wicked—but to convert them into new men, or rather to change them into angels. We come to him covetous, he makes us liberal; lascivious, he makes us chaste; violent, he makes us meek; impious, he makes us religious."

Regeneration is not a change of the old nature, but an introduction of a new nature. Not "Ishmael changed," but "Isaac born," is the son of the promise.

Whom God adopts, he anoints; whom he makes sons, he makes saints.—*Watson.*

One of my parishioners at East Hampton, converted after having lived through three or four revivals, to the age of fifty, and having given up hope, used to exclaim for several weeks after his change, "Is it I? Am I the same man who used to think it so hard to be converted, and my case so hopeless? Is it I? Is it I? Oh, wonderful!"—*Dr. Lyman Beecher.*

LXXXVIII.

"THEY HAVE REFUSED TO RETURN."—*Jeremiah* v. 3

THERE is about all men the primary evil of sin.

This is greatly increased by a refusal to return to their allegiance.

This is intensified by the rejection of pressing invitations.

I. WHO HAVE REFUSED TO RETURN?

1. Those who have said as much. With unusual honesty or presumption, they have made public declaration that they will never quit their sinful ways.
2. Those who have made a promise to repent, but have not performed it.
3. Those who have offered other things instead of practical return to God:—ceremonies, religiousness, morality, and the like.
4. Those who have only returned in appearance. Formalists, mere professors, and hypocrites offer the counterfeit for the genuine; and thus in a veiled manner really refuse to repent.
5. Those who have only returned in part. Hug

ging some sins while hanging others is a wretched method of continuing rebellion while feigning submission.

II. WHAT THIS REFUSAL UNVEILS.

1. An intense love of sin. Suppose the prodigal had refused to leave the famine-stricken country, it would have proved his insane attachment to those with whom he had spent his substance.
2. A want of love to the great Father, who bids them return.
3. A disbelief of God: they neither believe in what he has revealed concerning the evil consequences of their sin, nor in what he promises as to the benefit of returning from it.
4. A despising of God: they reject his counsel, his command, and even himself.
5. A resolve to continue in evil. This is their proud *ultimatum*, "they have refused to return."
6. A trifling with serious concerns. They are too busy, too fond of gaiety, etc. There is time enough yet. There is no need to be so earnest. No doubt things will come right. Thus they treat God's command as a light matter.

II. WHAT DEEPENS THE SIN OF THIS REFUSAL?

1. When correction brings no repentance.
2. When conscience is violated, and the Spirit of

God is resisted. Repentance is seen to be right, but yet refused: duty is known but declined.

3. When repentance is known to be the happiest course, and yet it is obstinately neglected against the plainest reasons.
4. When this obstinacy is long-continued, and is persevered in against convictions and inward promptings.
5. When vile reasons are at the bottom: such as secret sins, which the sinner dares not confess or quit; or the fear of man, which makes the mind cowardly.

IV. WHAT IS THE REAL REASON OF THIS REFUSAL?

1. It may be ignorance, but that can be only in part, for it is plainly a man's duty to return to his Lord. No mystery surrounds this simple precept,—"Return."
2. It may be self-conceit: perhaps they dream that they are already in the right road.
3. It is at times sheer recklessness. The man refuses to consider his own best interests. He resolves to be a trifler; death and hell and heaven are to him as toys to sport with.
4. It is a dislike of holiness. That lies at the bottom of it: men cannot endure humility, self-denial, and obedience to God.
5. It is a preference for the present above the eternal future.

Oh, do not refuse the reasonable request to return when God tenderly invites you to come to himself! Is it not right? Is it not wise?

Life or death hangs on your choice! Why will you die?

Let a sweet consent be given. "Say, "I will arise, and go unto my Father." You will never regret obedience to such a suggestion.

What is the riotous living of the far country compared with the joy of your Father's house.

From the cross the Lord Jesus calls on you to return. Hasten home!

Morsels.

The door of heaven shuts from below, not from above. "Your iniquities have separated," saith the Lord.—*Williams, of Wern.*

Lord Byron, a short time before death, was heard to say, "Shall I sue for mercy?" After a long pause, he added, "Come, come, no weakness; let's be a man to the last!"

The reason why a wicked man doth not turn unto God is not because he cannot (though he cannot), but because he will not. He cannot say at the day of judgment, "Lord, thou knowest I did my best to be holy, but I could not." The man that had not on a wedding-garment could not say, "Lord, I was not able to get one." But he was "speechless."—*W. Fenner.*

LXXXIX.

"ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS, WHERE IS THE GOOD WAY, AND WALK THEREIN, AND YE SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS." —*Jeremiah* vi. 16.

IT is the distinguishing feature of the good old way that in it we find rest for our souls. This is one of the tokens by which we may discern the false from the true.

Rest was the promise of the Saviour. "I will give you rest."

Rest is the point in which the law failed. Moses could not lead the people into Canaan, neither can the works of the law conduct us into the rest of God.

Rest has been enjoyed by believers, and it is now enjoyed by them.

Rest is never found apart from the gospel, and faith in Jesus.

Rest comes not from wealth, health, honor, or any other earthly thing.

I. IN "THE GOOD WAY" WE FIND REST IF WE WALK THEREIN.

We walk by faith in the gospel way, and are rested.

1. The way of pardon by an atonement gives rest to the conscience.

2. The way of believing the Word as a little child gives rest to the understanding.
3. The way of trusting our affairs with God gives rest to the mind.
4. The way of obedience to divine commands gives rest to the soul.
5. The way of communion with Christ gives rest to the heart.

It is no little matter which can rest the desires, the fears, the regrets, the questionings, of our manhood; but gospel doctrines, promises, and precepts, and the gospel spirit accomplish this.

II. REST FOUND BY WALKING IN "THE GOOD WAY" IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL.

Some forms of rest rust and injure the soul; but this does not.

1. It brings satisfaction, but not self-satisfaction.
2. It brings a sense of safety, but does not lead to presumptuous sin.
3. It creates content, but also excites desires for progress.
4. It removes legal fears, but supplies superior motives for holiness.

It is actually beneficial to a man to walk in the good way, for as a saved believer his possession of salvation—

Supplies him with an answer to the bribes of Satan; for what can Satan offer which could be preferable to assured salvation?

Sets him free from personal anxiety, and thus

enables him to serve the Lord without distraction, since he is himself saved.

Engenders intense love to his Saviour for his completed work.

Excites him to holy imitation of his heavenly Father, who is so gracious as to afford rest to the weary.

III. REST OF THIS KIND SHOULD BE ENJOYED NOW.

It is so enjoyed by many of us, and it is a grievous error when it is not the case with all real Christians.

1. You should be in the way, know that you are there, and try to keep to the very middle of the road. Truly believe in Jesus, and perfect rest must come. "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God:" Rom. v. 1.
2. You should have no doubt that the way is good, and that it is the way of the Lord. This is the assurance of understanding.
3. You should lay aside all anxious care because "he careth for you."
4. You should feel an intense satisfaction in Jesus. You will do so unless you live at a distance from him, and so miss his presence and smile. A present Christ is a well of delight.
5. You should indulge the largest anticipations concerning your future blessedness, both in time and eternity.

We challenge Romanists, sacramentarians, self-justiciaries, and the like, to say that they have any

rest. Rome does not promise it even to her own votaries, either in this world or in the world to come; but goes on saying her masses for the repose of the souls of her own departed cardinals, who evidently are not at rest. If her most eminent divines go to purgatory, where do the common people go?

We invite all the laboring and laden to come and try the Lord Jesus, and see if he does not rest them at once, and for ever.

We bear our own willing testimony to the sweetness, safety, perpetuity, and truthfulness of the rest of faith.

WAY-MARKS.

It is called "the good way." It is not the easy way: the idle and the foolish ask for that, but it is not worth seeking for, since it leads to poverty and perdition. Neither is it the popular way, for few there be that find it. But it is the good way, made by a good God, in infinite goodness to his creatures; paved by our good Lord Jesus, with pains and labors immeasurable; and revealed by the good Spirit to those whose eternal good he seeks. It is the way of holiness, of peace, of safety, and it leads to heaven. Is it not good? It has been traversed by the best of men since time began, and the unclean do not pass over it. It is good at its commencement, for at its entrance men are born again; it is good in its continuation, for they are righteous who hold on their

way; and it is good in its termination, for it leads to perfection, to bliss, to God himself.

In this good old way you shall find rest if you have never enjoyed it before; travelling you shall rest, as certain birds are said to rest upon the wing. Joy shall be upon your head, peace shall prepare the place of your feet. It is wisdom's dominion, and concerning her we read, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Rest for the conscience comes to those who enter God's way of salvation; rest of heart arises out of their love to him who is the Way; rest of brain from their acceptance of his teaching; rest of desire from their satisfaction with his person,—in a word, the soul rests in all its powers and faculties. Nor does it alone rest in the present; the future is guaranteed beyond all fear.—*C. H. S.*

Here there is a well-beaten track under our feet. Let us keep it. It may not be quite the shortest way; it may not take us through all the grandeur and sublimity which bolder pedestrians might see: we may miss a picturesque waterfall, a remarkable glacier, a charming view: but the track will bring us safe to our quarters for the night.—*Dr. Dale.*

Dr. Judson once sent for a poor Christian convert, who was about to engage in something which he feared would not be for her spiritual good. "Look here," he said, snatching a ruler from the table, and tracing a not very straight line upon the floor; "here

is where you have been walking. You have made a crooked track, to be sure—out of the path half the time; but then you have kept near it, and not taken to new roads; and you have, to a certain extent, grown in grace. And now here you stand. You know where this path leads. You know what is before you: some struggles, some sorrows, and finally, eternal life, and a crown of glory. But to the left branches off another very pleasant road, and along the air floats, rather temptingly, a pretty bubble. You do not mean to leave the path you have walked in fifteen years; you only want to step aside, and catch the bubble, and think you will come back again; but you never will." The solemn warning was not given in vain.

XC.

"CAN THE ETHIOPIAN CHANGE HIS SKIN?"—*Jer.* xiii. 23.

JEREMIAH had spoken to these people, and they would not hear; he had wept over them, and they would not consider. Even God's judgments had failed to move them, and he came to the conclusion that they were incorrigible, and could no more improve than a black man could become white.

Jeremiah's figure was most probably suggested to him by the Ethiopians in the king's court, one of whom attended more to him than his countrymen ever did. (Jer. xxxviii. 7—13.) Persons of color were no doubt more notable among an exclusive people like the Jews than they would be among us.

I. THE QUESTION AND ITS ANSWER. "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin?*" The expected reply is, "He cannot do so."

The outward impossibility is the Ethiopian's changing the color of his own skin: a physical experiment never yet accomplished.

The inward impossibility is a change of heart and character by one "accustomed to do evil."

Can he—will he—change himself? Never.

The difficulty in the sinner's case lies—

1. In the thoroughness of the operation. The Ethiopian can wash, or paint; but he cannot change that which is part and parcel of himself. A sinner cannot change his own nature.
2. In the fact that the will is itself diseased by sin. The man cannot do good, for he has no mind to it, no wish that way. In man's will lies the essence of the difficulty: he *can*-not means that he does not *will* to have it done. He is morally unable.
3. In the strength of habit. Use is second nature. Practice in transgression has forged chains, and bound the man to evil.
4. In the pleasure of sin, which fascinates and enslaves the mind.
5. In the appetite for sin, which gathers intensity from indulgence. Drunkenness, lechery, covetousness, &c., are a growing force.
6. In the blindness of the understanding, which prevents men from seeing the evil of their ways, or noting their danger. Conscience is drugged into a deep sleep, out of which the man cannot arouse himself.
7. In the growing hardness of the heart, which becomes more stolid and unbelieving every day, till nothing affects it.
8. In the evident fact that outward means prove ineffectual: like "soap" and "nitre" on a

negro, they fail to touch the living blackness.

For all these reasons we answer the question in the negative: sinners can no more renew themselves than Ethiopians can change their skins.

Why then preach to them?

It is Christ's command, and we are bound to obey. Their inability does not hinder our ministry, for power goes with the word.

Why tell them that it is their duty to repent?

Because it is so: *moral* inability is no excuse: the law is not to be lowered because man has grown too evil to keep it.

Why tell them of this moral inability?

To drive them to self-despair, and make them look to Christ.

II. ANOTHER QUESTION AND ANSWER. *Can the Ethiopian's skin be changed?* Or, can the sinner be made anew?

This is a very different affair, and in it lies the door of hope for men.

Assuredly the Lord can make a black man white.

The greatest sinner can be transformed into a saint.

The grounds for so believing are many.

Here are a few of them,—

1. All things are possible with God. Matt. xix. 26.
2. The Holy Spirit has special power over the human heart.
3. The Lord Jesus has determined to work this

wonder, and for this purpose he came into this world and died, and rose again. "He shall save his people from their sins:" Matt. i. 21.

4. Many such jet-black sinners have been totally changed: among ourselves there are such, and in all places such may be found.
5. The gospel is prepared with that end. It does more than change the skin; for it affects the head, the heart, the understanding, the conscience, the motives, the desires, the hopes, the fears; and through these, the whole conduct, so that those who were accustomed to do evil become expert in doing good.
6. God has made his church long for such transformations, and prayer has been offered that they may now be wrought. Will not the Lord hear us?

Herein lies hope for the most inveterate sinner.

Not in the bath of baptism;
Nor in the scalding tears of remorse;
Nor in the medicine of vows and pledges:
But in his word of power, who doeth great wonders of grace.

Chips.

Dirt contracted may be washed off, but we cannot alter the natural color of a hair (Matt. v. 36), much less of the skin; and so impossible is it, morally

impossible, to reclaim and reform these people.—*Matthew Henry.*

If it were possible for those who have been for ages in hell to return to the earth, (and not to be regenerated,) I firmly believe that, notwithstanding all they have suffered for sin, they would still love it, and return to the practice of it.—*John Ryland.*

The Christian sects in Syria appear to consider a true case of Druze conversion to Christianity as out of the question. "The wolf's whelps," they say, "are not tamed." The conversion of many sinners appears equally impossible, and yet how many such triumphs of grace are recorded as that which John Newton described in himself: "I was a wild beast on the coast of Africa once, but the Lord Jesus caught me, and tamed me, and now people come to see me as they would go to look at the lions in the tower.

O endless misery!
I labor still, but still in vain,
The stains of sin I see
Are woaded all, or dy'd in grain.
There's not a blot will stir a jot,
For all that I can do.
There is no hope in fuller's soap,
Though I add nitre too.

I many ways have tried
Have often soak'd it in cold fears;
And when a time I spied,
Pour'd upon it scalding tears:

Have rins'd and rubb'd, and scrap'd and scrub'd
And turn'd it up and down;
Yet can I not wash out one spot;
It's rather fouler grown.

Can there no help be had?
Lord, thou art holy, thou art pure:
Mine heart is not so bad,
So foul, but thou canst cleanse it, sure.
Speak, blessed Lord, wilt thou afford
Me means to make it clean?
I know thou wilt: thy blood was spilt.
Should it run still in vain?

Christopher Harvey, in "Schola Cordis."

XCI.

"RETURN YE NOW EVERY ONE FROM HIS EVIL WAY, AND MAKE YOUR WAYS AND YOUR DOINGS GOOD."—*Jeremiah* xviii. 11.

THIS is the voice of mercy, anxious about each individual.

Justice might slay the sinner in his sin; but mercy would slay the sin, and spare the sinner.

Yet it is the voice of holiness, opposed to each man's special evil way; and claiming of each man an acceptable life. The Lord Jesus has not come to be the Minister of sin, but the Destroyer of it.

Let us hear each one for himself on this occasion, for have we not every one some evil way of his own?

It is Jehovah's voice, and concerning its message we enquire,—

I. WHAT? "*Return.*"

This includes three things.

1. Stop! Stand still! Go not a foot further in your evil way.
2. Turn round! Face towards God, holiness, heaven, &c.
3. Hasten back! Practically move in the right way, and continue in that good course which is the reverse of your present one.

II. WHEN? "Return ye *now*."

1. Every step makes so much more to retrace.
2. Every step makes it more difficult to return.
3. Further wandering will be wanton and wilful; a presumptuous rejection of the warning which is now so earnestly given.
4. Never again may you have an opportunity to return.

There is nothing certain about life save its uncertainty.

Joy is being lost by this procrastination; you are missing present peace of mind.

God is robbed of your service, and you cannot make up the loss.

Man is being injured by your example.

Every reason pleads for *now*, but for delay there is no excuse.

III. WHO? "Return ye now *every one*."

The personality of the call to each hearer of it is necessary, for—

1. Each man has his own peculiar way of sin.
2. Each man is apt to think of his neighbor's sin more than his own.
3. Each man needs a special effectual call ere he will turn.
4. Each man is now lovingly invited to return.

IV. FROM WHAT? "From *his evil way*."

"We have turned every one to his own way:"

Is. liii. 6. This way of your own you are to return from,—

From your own personal sin.
From your constitutional sin.
From your most frequent sin.

To many it will be important to be able to discover this favorite sin.

1. It is that into which you are most easily led.
2. It is that which has already been most indulged by you.
3. It is that about which you are most irritated if you are rebuked concerning it. Darling sins must not be touched, or their fond friends grow angry.
4. It is that for which you give up other sins; a covetous person will not be extravagant, a hypocrite will deny himself, &c.
5. It is that with which you are most loth to part.
6. It is that on which you spend most money, energy, &c.

From such a darling sin each man must turn.

V. To WHAT? "*Make your ways and your doings good.*"

Negative religion is not enough, there must be positive goodness.

1. Your general habits or ways must be made good as a whole.
2. Your *ways* in reference to yourself.
3. Your *doings* towards both God and man

Personal examination of the utmost importance.

Practical repentance an absolute necessity.

Yet how difficult is the way back. To descend into sin is easy, but to retrace your steps, this is the work, this is the labor.

Only by faith in the Lord Jesus can it be accomplished, a look at his cross breeds more repentance than anything in the world besides.

To those who believe in Jesus, he will send the Holy Spirit to lead them in the way everlasting.

Explanatory.

There are two things proper to a man that *returneth:* first, to go a way clean contrary to the way he went before; secondly, to tread out and obliterate his former steps . . . First, I say, he must go a way clean contrary to his former way. Many men think that the way to hell is but a little out of the way to heaven, so that a man in a small time, with small ado, may pass out of the one into the other; but they are much deceived: for as sin is more than a stepping aside, *viz.*, a plain, a direct going away from God; so is repentance, or the forsaking of sin, more than a little coasting out of one way into another. Crossings will not serve; there is no way, from the road of sin to the place we seek, but to go quite back again the way we came. The way of *pleasure* in sin must be changed for *sorrow* for the same. He that hath superstitiously worshipped false gods must now as devoutly serve the true; the

tongue that hath uttered swearings, and spoken blasphemies, must as plentifully sound forth the name of God in prayer and thanksgiving; the covetous man must become liberal; the oppressor of the poor as charitable in relieving them; the calumniator of his brother a tender guarder of his credit; in fine, he that hated his brother before must now love him as tenderly as himself.—*Joseph Mede.*

"*Now*," thou resolvest, "I will hereafter look to it better than I have done before." Alas, this will for hereafter is no will! First: because it is only to shuffle off the willing of the present. The heart is unwilling to obey, and therefore it puts off the commandment to the future, not for any desire that it hath to do it hereafter, but only because it is unwilling to do it for the present; like a man that is unwilling to lend. "I'll lend you hereafter," says he, only because he would shuffle off lending at all. Secondly: this will for hereafter is no will, because it goes without God's will. God's will is *now;* thine is *hereafter.* "He that will not when he may, when he would he shall have 'Nay.'" Take heed lest when thou wouldst fain be pardoned, and criest, "Lord, open to me," thou dost find thyself too late.—*William Fenner.*

A missionary in India, addressing the natives on the question of sin, asked, "What say your own shasters?—

> 'I a sinner, you a sinner, sinners every one,
> *Sinless*—none are found who dwell beneath the sun.'"

1. He that leaves not all sin; 2. He that leaves sin only outwardly; 3. He that leaves sin because he cannot commit it; 4. He that leaves sin out of sinister respects; 5. He that leaves one sin for another; 6. He that leaves sin but for a time; 7. He that leaves sin, but does not endeavor to subdue it; 8. He that so turns from sin as not to turn to God—has not had complete repentance.—*Clarkson.*

Many would kill the adder, and spare the viper as in Hudibras, they—

> "Compound for sins they are inclined to,
> By damning those they have no mind to."—*C. H. S*

XCII.

"CALL UNTO ME, AND I WILL ANSWER THEE, AND SHEW THEE GREAT AND MIGHTY THINGS WHICH THOU KNOWEST NOT."—*Jeremiah* xxxiii. 3.

THIS is a prison-word: let those who are spiritually in prison prize it.

This was the second time the Lord had spoken to the prophet while in the dungeon. God leaves not his people because of their being in ill odor with the world, nor even when they are put into prison. Nay, rather, he doubles his visits when they are in double trouble.

The first prison-word was a trial of Jeremiah's faith by *obedience:* he was to redeem the field at Anathoth; and this he did.

This second word tested his faith by *prayer*, and we doubt not that he endured the test, for in after days he saw great and mighty things, even as the Lord had promised.

The text belongs to every afflicted servant of God. It encourages him in a threefold manner,—

I. TO CONTINUE IN PRAYER. "Call unto me!"

1. Pray, though you have prayed. See previous chapter at 16th verse and onward.

2. Pray concerning your present trouble. In chapter xxxii. 24 the prophet mentions "the mounts" which were raised against Jerusalem, and in verse 4 of this chapter the Lord answers on that very point.
3. Pray though you are still in prison after prayer. If deliverance tarries, make your prayers the more importunate.
4. Pray; for the word of the Lord comes to you with this command.
5. Pray; for the Holy Spirit prompts you, and helps you.

We need this precept because of our backwardness, forgetfulness, want of spirituality, and tendency to unbelief.

This precept is sent to us because of the Lord's wisdom, love, and condescending thoughtfulness for our welfare.

II. To EXPECT ANSWERS TO PRAYER. "I will answer thee, and shew thee."

Usually the promise is to "hear" us: but when we are in trouble the promise is special: "I will answer thee."

The Lord will answer us because—

1. He has appointed prayer, and made arrangements for its presentation and acceptance. He could not have meant it to be a mere farce: that were to treat us as fools.
2. He prompts, encourages, and quickens prayer; and surely he would never mock us by ex-

citing desires which he never meant to gratify. Such a thought well nigh blasphemes the Holy Ghost, who indites prayer in the heart.

3. His nature is such that he must hear his children.
4. He has given his promise in the text; and it is often repeated elsewhere: he cannot lie or deny himself.
5. He has aleady answered many of his people, and ourselves also.

We know that the only limit to the prevalence of prayer is our heavenly Father's wise and loving will; which to his loving children, is really no limit whatever. Let us ask in faith, and look up in hope.

III. To EXPECT GREAT THINGS AS ANSWERS TO PRAYER. "I will shew thee great and mighty things."

Read the previous chapter from verse 18, and learn from it that we are to look for things—

1. Great in counsel: full of wisdom and significance.
2. Mighty in work: revealing might, and mightily effectual.
3. New things to ourselves, fresh in our experience, and therefore surprising. We may expect the unexpected.
4. Divine things: "I will shew thee." These are enumerated in the verses which follow the

text, even to the end of the chapter; such as these—

Health and cure (verse 6).
Liberation from captivity (verse 7).
Forgiveness of iniquity (verse 8).

See how prayer increases the knowledge of those who know best.

See how saints may advance in experience by calling unto God.

See how sufferers may win unexpected deliverances.

See how workers may achieve surprising marvels.

See how seekers may find more than they dare expect.

Further Encouragements.

Many years ago, the late Duchess of Gordon called on good Harrington Evans, and said, "I have just five minutes, but I could not leave town without calling to say 'good-bye!'" "Five minutes," said Mr. Evans, with that solemn and impressive manner by which he was distinguished; "five minutes! Then pray! Pray! Pray! Good morning." "I felt so struck with these words," said the Duchess to a friend, "that I could not forget them; and, as I thought on them, I was led to study prayer, as a means of grace as well as an act of worship, and ever after my chief work in the Lord's service became the promotion of prayer-meetings."

A young engineer was being examined, and this question was put to him: "Suppose you have a steam-pump constructed for a ship, under your own supervision, and know that everything is in perfect order, yet, when you throw out the hose, it will not draw; what should you think?" "I should think, sir, there must be a defect somewhere." "But such a conclusion is not admissible; for the supposition is that everything is perfect, and yet that the pump will not work." "Then, sir," replied the student, "I should look over the side of the ship to see if the river had run dry." Even so it would appear that if true prayer is not answered the nature of God must have changed.

God's praying people get to know much more of his mind than others; like as John, by weeping, got the book opened; and Daniel, by prayer, had the king's secret revealed unto him in a night vision. "*Bene orasse, est bene studuisse,*" said Luther; who, as he had much communion with God by prayer, so holy truths were daily more and more made known unto him he knew not how or which way, as himself said.—*Trapp.*

Sir Walter Raleigh one day asking a favor from Queen Elizabeth, the latter said to him, "Raleigh, when will you leave off begging?" To which he answered, "When your Majesty leaves off giving." Ask great things of God. Expect great things from God. Let his past goodness make us "instant in prayer—*New Cyclopædia of Illustrative Anecdote.*

Thomas Brooks, alluding to the old classical myth of Daedalus, who, being imprisoned in the island of Crete, made wings for himself, by which he escaped to Italy, says, "Christians must do as Daedalus, who, when he could not escape by a way upon earth, went by a way of heaven." Holy prayers are the wings of the soul's deliverance.

The dungeon of the Mamertine, where a probable tradition declares that Paul was for a while confined, is entered through a round hole in the floor of another dungeon above. The uppermost apartment is dark enough, but the lower one is darkness itself, so that the apostle's imprisonment was of the severest kind. We noticed, however, a strange fact:—in the hard floor there is a beautiful fountain of clear crystal water, which doubtless was as fresh in Paul's day as it is now; of course the Papists believe the fountain to be miraculous; we who are not so credulous of traditions rather see in it a symbol full of instruction:—there never was a dungeon for God's servants which was without its well of consolation.—*C. H. S.*

XCIII.

"LET JERUSALEM COME INTO YOUR MIND."—*Jer.* li. 50.

THE captives in Babylon are charged to remember Jerusalem,—

Because the temple of their God was there;
To keep them from settling down in Babylon;
To make them long for the holy city; and
To keep them prepared to return to it.

There are equally good reasons for our remembering the New Jerusalem.

We are too apt to forget our spiritual citizenship, and hence we will meditate on our text under two aspects.

I. THERE IS A JERUSALEM HERE BELOW WHICH SHOULD COME INTO OUR MIND.

The church of the living God is our holy city, the city of the Great King, and we should have it in mind,—

1. To unite with its citizens. We should join with them in open profession of faith in Christ, in Christian love and mutual help, in holy service, worship, communion, &c.
2. To pray for its prosperity. Whenever it is well with us in prayer, we should let the

cause of God be on our mind. Our window, like that of Daniel, should be opened towards Jerusalem.

3. To labor for its advancement. We should remember it in the allotment of our money, the use of our time, the employment of our talents, the exercise of our influence, &c.
4. To prefer its privileges above earthly gain. We ought to consider these privileges in our choice of our residence, occupation, &c. With many professors this is a very small matter.
5. To act consistently with her holy character. We must not dishonor the place of our citizenship. God's people must not degrade his name and cause by living in sin.
6. To lament its declensions and transgressions. Remember how our Lord wept over Jerusalem, and Paul wept over enemies in the churches. Luke xix. 41. Phil. iii. 18.

Oh, that all Christians took a deeper interest in the church of God!

It were well if into all our joys and sorrows the cause of God were interwoven like a thread of gold. He is a poor patriot who forgets his country, and he is no Christian who does not bear the church upon his heart.

II. THERE IS A JERUSALEM ABOVE WHICH SHOULD COME INTO MIND.

1. Let the believer's thoughts often go thither, for

Jesus is there, our departed brethren are there, our own home is there, and thither our hopes and desires should always tend.

It should be upon our minds—

In our earthly enjoyments, lest we grow worldly.

In our daily trials, lest we grow despondent.

In our associations, lest we idolize present friendships.

In our bereavements, lest we grieve inordinately.

In old age, that we may be on the watch for the home-going.

In death, that visions of glory may brighten our last hours.

In all seasons, that our conversation may be in heaven.

2. Let the unconverted permit such thoughts to come into their mind, for they may well enquire of themselves thus,—

What if I never enter heaven?

Shall I never meet my godly relatives again?

Where then must I go?

Can I hope that my present life will lead me to heaven?

Why am I not taking the right path?

Unbelievers perish: why am I one of them? Do I wish to perish?

How can I hope to enter heaven if I do not so much as think about it, or the Lord who reigns in it?

Such thoughts will come to our minds if we will let them.

Shall we not open the door of our minds at once, and let the heavenly visitors enter and abide?

Reminders.

The undying love of the Jews for their Fatherland, and their ineradicable desire to return to it, are displayed in an affecting manner on the day of atonement, which is still observed by them with great solemnity. The services of the day close with the beseeching shout, "when next year comes, may we all be in Jerusalem!" We could almost make this prayer our own as we think of the "Jerusalem above."

I have been endeavoring to establish amongst us what are called "Aaron and Hur Societies," *i. e.*, little collections of four or five or more persons, who meet before service on Sabbath morning to spend an hour in prayer for a blessing on the minister and the ordinances. They began on New Year's Day, and we seemed to have an immediate answer, for the meeting was unusually solemn, and we have reason to hope that the word was not preached in vain.—*Dr. Payson.*

My soul shall pray for Zion still,
While life or breath remains:
There my best friends, my kindred dwell;
There God my Saviour reigns.—*Watts.*

The church of God should come into our minds as spontaneously as the recollection of our wife or mother. When we look at a map of any country, we should think of how the cause of God prospers in that region. If we make a profit in business, one of our first thoughts should be,—"now I can do something more for the work of the Lord." When the newspaper is read, it should be in relation to the progress of the kingdom of God. This one thing should tinge all other things with its own color, and draw all other thoughts into its net. The cause of Christ should be an all-absorbing maelstrom, into which all our thoughts and pursuits should be drawn. A man of one idea sees the universe by the light of it, and he who loves the church of God with all his heart will do the same. How can we say, "Lord, remember me," to Christ in heaven, if we do not remember his church on earth?

It may be a sin to long for death, but I am sure it is no sin to long for heaven.—*Matthew Henry.*

Blessed are the home-sick, for they shall come at last to the Father's house.—*Heinrich Stillings.*

John Eliot was once on a visit to a merchant, and finding him in his counting-house, where he saw books of business on the table, and all his books of devotion on the shelf, he said to him, "Sir, here is earth on the table, and heaven on the shelf. Pray don't think so much of the table as altogether to forget the shelf."

"Here I sit the whole day with the visage of the church ever before me, and the passage 'Why hast thou made all the sons of men in vain?' How horrible a form of God's anger is that abominable kingdom of the Roman Antichrist! I abhor my own hardness of heart that I am not dissolved in tears, and that I do not weep fountains of tears for the slain sons of my people. But is there no one to arise, and cleave to God, and make himself a wall for the house of Israel in this last day of his wrath? God have mercy on us! Wherefore, be thou meanwhile instant as a minister of the Word, and fortify the walls and towers of Jerusalem till they shall assail thee.—*From a letter to Melancthon, written by Luther at the Castle of the Wartburg.*

XCIV.

"I WILL SETTLE YOU AFTER YOUR OLD ESTATES, AND WILL DO BETTER UNTO YOU THAN AT YOUR BEGINNINGS, AND YE SHALL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD.—*Ezekiel* XXXVI. 11.

WHEN other nations fall they rise no more, but to the covenanted people a future still remains.

Even the land given by covenant has an entailed blessing on it, for these words are to the "mountains of Israel."

To hypocrites and formalists an end cometh; but true children of God rise again after decays and declensions. As saith the prophet, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me:" Micah vii. 8.

A greater blessing than that which they have lost may yet be granted to restored wanderers.

The text contains a great promise. Oh, that we may enjoy it!

I. WHAT WAS THERE SO GOOD IN OUR BEGINNINGS?

As Israel's land in the beginning flowed with milk and honey, so our first estate had a singular richness about it. Oftentimes, in looking back, we sing,—

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus, and his Word?

1. We enjoyed a vivid sense of free and full forgiveness.
2. We had a delicious proof of the joy of true religion.
3. We gained repeated victories over sinful inclinations, and outward temptations; and this made us jubilant in Christ.
4. We felt great delight in prayer, the Word, communion, &c.
5. We abounded in zeal and service, and the joy of the Lord was our strength.
6. We were in our first love, and everything was lively, intense, hopeful, wonderful, to our humble, happy mind. We were simple-hearted and confiding, had not yet found out the imperfections of our brethren, and were too humble to look for them. We have not gained much by losing that confidence if in its room we have received suspicion.

We read of "the first ways of David:" 2 Chron. xvii. 3. We are bidden to do our "first works:" Rev. ii. 5.

II. CAN WE ENJOY SOMETHING BETTER THAN OUR BEGINNINGS?

Assuredly we shall, if the Lord will fulfil this

promise; and that he is sure to do if we walk more closely with him.

1. Our faith will be stronger, more steadfast, and intelligent.
2. Our knowledge will be fuller and deeper.
3. Our love will be more constant, practical, enduring.
4. Our prayer will be more prevalent.
5. Our usefulness will be more extended, more abiding.
6. Our whole being will be more mature.

We are to shine more and more unto the perfect day. Prov. iv. 18.

Growth in grace brings with it many good things?

III. How can we secure this betterness?

There must be a re-settlement according to our old estates in our own souls, and then there will be a renewed settlement by the act of God.

1. We must return to our first simple faith in Jesus.
2. We must quit the sins which alienated us from God.
3. We must be more thorough, and earnest.
4. We must seek after closer fellowship with Christ.
5. We must more resolutely strive to advance in divine things.

Admire the liberality of our God! He promises to do better unto us than at our beginnings. What more can he do?

See the constancy of his love—how he maintains ancient settlements, and restores old estates! Covenant heritages are entailed upon their holders by the unchanging grace of God.

Mark with what tenderness he woos us to return to his fellowship: he draws, he allures, he wins by greatness of love!

Let us, in the power of his Holy Spirit, return to him!

Doors of Hope.

God's dealings with his people are best at last; they may have much kindness and mercy in the morning, but they shall have more in the evening. "I will settle you after your old estates," &c. The Jews had the best wine at last; they had milk and honey before, but the feast of fat things full of marrow, and of wines on the lees well-refined, were at the latter end of their day given in; they had Christ and the Gospel at last. Abraham had much of the world at first, and his Isaac afterward. "God blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning." Simeon in his latter days saw Christ, and had him in his arms.—*Wm. Greenhill.*

No instance of backsliding can be more aggravated than that of the apostle Peter, and yet no recovery was more signal. While that stands upon record, no traitor to his Lord and Master is justified in saying, "The door of hope is closed against my return." The Scriptures contain several instances in which the

lamentable and disgraceful lapses of God's people are shown to be followed by their recovery and restoration. Frequently such characters, after they have been corrected and chastened of the Lord, have risen to stations of great eminence in his church. David in the Old Testament, and Peter in the New, while both illustrating the shame and sorrow of a backsliding state, stand forth as monuments of that sovereign grace which can forgive the penitent wanderer, and once more infuse into his heart "the peace that passeth all understanding."—*Leifchild.*

Fractures well cured make us more strong.—*Herbert.*

The joy of conversation is great—

> "Earth has a joy unknown to heaven,
> The new-born peace of sins forgiven!
> Tears of such pure and deep delight,
> Ye angels! never dimmed your sight:"

but there are wondrous joys as yet unknown to the inexperienced soul, and concerning which the most advanced believer has to sing—

> "I have a heritage of joy
> That yet I must not see:
> The hand that bled to make it mine,
> Is keeping it for me."

Those that will not return to the duties they have neglected, cannot expect to return to the comforts they have lost.—*G. S. Bowes.*

He is a skilful physician indeed who, finding a man sorely afflicted, not only succeeds in restoring

him to health, but actually causes him to be better than he was before, dealing with his medicine, not only with the disease which caused pain, but with some other which lay deeper, but had scarcely been perceived by the patient. Such is the medicine of mercy. Thus graciously doth God deal with repenting sinners. He must be worse than a brute beast who would turn this into an argument for sinning. A true child of God feels the water standing in his eyes when he thinks of such superabounding love.

XCV.

"AND I WILL MULTIPLY THE FRUIT OF THE TREE, AND THE INCREASE OF THE FIELD, THAT YE SHALL RECEIVE NO MORE REPROACH OF FAMINE AMONG THE HEATHEN.

"THEN SHALL YE REMEMBER YOUR OWN EVIL WAYS, AND YOUR DOINGS THAT WERE NOT GOOD, AND SHALL LOATHE YOURSELVES IN YOUR OWN SIGHT FOR YOUR INIQUITIES, AND FOR YOUR ABOMINATIONS."—*Ezekiel* XXXVI. 30, 31.

THE day of manifested mercy is to be the day of hearty repentance. "*Then*." When God loads you with benefits you shall loathe yourselves.

The Lord speaks as one who is supreme in the region of free agency, and able to work his will with human minds: "Then *shall ye*," etc.

His processes of grace are such as, in the nature of things, lead up to the end which he proposes.

He declares that he will conquer by love,—love so wonderful that the objects of it must of necessity yield to its power, and change their minds and their conduct.

Repentance is wrought in the heart by a sense of love divine.

This sets repentance in its true light, and helps us to meet a great many mistakes which have darkened this subject. Many are kept from Christ and hope by misapprehensions of this matter. They have—

I. MISTAKEN IDEAS OF WHAT REPENTANCE IS.

They confound it with—

1. Morbid self-accusation, which is the fruit of dyspepsia, or melancholy, or insanity. This is an infirmity of mind, and not a grace of the Spirit. A physician may here do more than a divine.
2. Unbelief, despondency, despair: which are not even a help to repentance, but tend rather to harden the heart.
3. Dread of hell, and sense of wrath: which might occur even to devils, and yet would not cause them to repent. A measure of this may go with repentance, but it is no part of it.
4. Satanic temptations. These are by no means like to repentance, which is the fruit of the Spirit.
5. A complete knowledge of the guilt of sin; which even advanced saints have not yet obtained.
6. Entire abstinence from all sin,—a consummation devoutly to be wished, but by no means included in repentance.

It is a hatred of evil
a sense of shame
a longing to avoid sin } wrought by a sense of divine love.

II. MISTAKEN IDEAS OF THE PLACE WHICH REPENTANCE OCCUPIES.

1. It is looked upon by some as a procuring cause

of grace, as if repentance merited remission: a grave error.

2. It is wrongly viewed by others as a preparation for grace; a human goodness laying the foundation for mercy, a meeting of God half way; this is a deadly error.
3. It is treated as a sort of qualification for believing, and even as the ground for believing: all which is legality, and contrary to pure gospel truth.
4. Others treat it as the argument for peace of mind. They have repented so much, and it must be all right. This is to build our confidence upon a false foundation.

Repentance attends faith, and is a precious gift of the Spirit of God.

III. Mistaken ideas of the way in which it is produced in the heart.

It is not produced by a distinct and immediate attempt to repent.

Nor by strong excitement at revival meetings.

Nor by meditating upon sin, and death, and hell, etc.

But the God of all grace produces it—

1. By his free grace, which by its action renews the heart (verse 26).
2. By bringing his great mercy to our mind.
3. By making us receive new mercy (verses 28—30).

4. By revealing himself and his methods of grace (verse 32).

Every gospel truth urges repentance upon the regenerate. Election, redemption, justification, adoption, eternal love, etc., are all arguments for loathing every evil way.

Every gospel privilege makes us loathe sin: prayer, praise, the reading of Scripture, the fellowship of saints, the table of the Lord, etc.

Every gospel hope purifies us from sin, whether it be a hope for more grace in this world, or for glory in the next.

Oh, that we might feel the touch of love, and weep ourselves away for having grieved our Lord! This would work in us a revenge against all our sins, and lead us to entire consecration to our holy Lord.

Rectifications.

There are no arguments like those that are drawn from the consideration of the great and glorious things Christ hath done for you; and if such will not take with you, and win upon you, I do not think the throwing of hell-fire in your faces will ever do it.—*Thomas Brooks.*

The Roman Catholic definition of penitence is not a bad one, though they draw bad conclusions from it—"*Confessio oris, contritio cordis, satisfactio vitæ*"—that is, for true repentance there should be confession with the mouth, grieving in the heart, and

amendment made for our faults as far as possible in our life.—*Richard Glover.*

Repentance,—the tear dropped from the eye of faith.

God's loving kindnesses and mercies do work more with sinners than his judgments do. All the time the Jews were in Babylon, their hearts were never so affected for their sins as after God brought them out, settled them in Canaan, and showed much love unto them; then they should remember their evil ways, before they minded them not; then they should loathe themselves. Mercies in Zion are more efficacious with sinners than judgments in Babylon; God's favor melts hard hearts sooner than the fire of his indignation; his kindness is very penetrative, it gets into the hearts of sinners sooner than his threats and frowns; it is like a small soaking rain, which goes to the roots of things, whereas a dashing rain runs away, and does little good. It was David's kindness that brake the heart of Saul, 1 Sam. xxiv.; and it is God's kindness which breaks the hearts of sinners. The milk and honey of the gospel affect the hearts of sinners more than the gall and wormwood of the law; Christ on Mount Zion brings more to repentance than Moses on Mount Sinai.—*William Greenhill.*

Cowper, the poet, in his own memoirs of his early life, describes the time when he reflected on the necessity of repentance. "I knew that many persons had spoken of shedding tears for sin; but when

I asked myself whether the time would ever come when I should weep for mine, it seemed to me that a stone might sooner do it. Not knowing that Christ was exalted to give repentance, I despaired of ever attaining it." A friend came to his bed-side, and declared to him the gospel. He insisted on the all-atoning efficacy of the blood of Jesus, and his righteousness for our justification. "Then," says Cowper, "while I heard this part of his discourse, and the Scriptures on which he founded it, my heart began to burn within me; my soul was pierced with a sense of my bitter ingratitude to so merciful a Saviour; and these tears, which I thought impossible, burst forth freely."

"Some people," says Philip Henry, "do not wish to hear much of repentance, but I think it so necessary that, if I should die in the pulpit, I wish to die preaching repentance; and if out of the pulpit, practising it."

XCVI.

"BUT THE MIRY PLACES THEREOF AND THE MARSHES THEREOF SHALL NOT BE HEALED; THEY SHALL BE GIVEN TO SALT." —*Ezekiel* xlvii. 11.

THE prophet saw in vision the flow of the life-giving river, and marked its wonderful and beneficial effects.

Let the chapter be read, and a brief abstract of it be given.

The prophet also observed that here and there the river carried no blessing: there were marshes which remained as barren as ever.

I. THERE ARE SOME MEN WHOM THE GOSPEL DOES NOT BLESS.

1. It stagnates in them: they hear in vain; learn but do not practise; feel but do not decide; resolve but do not perform.
2. It mingles with their corruptions, as clear water with the mire of the marshes. They see with blinded eye, understand in a carnal manner, and receive truth but not in the power of it.
3. It becomes food for their sins, even as rank sour grass is produced by the stagnant waters of "miry places."

Their unbelief makes mysteries into apologies for infidelity.

Their enmity is stirred by the sovereignty of grace.

Their impenitence takes liberties from grace, and makes excuses out of divine mercy.

Their carnal security feeds on the fact of having heard the gospel.

It makes them worse and worse. The more rain, the more mire.

The more grace misused, the more wicked the heart.

The more unsanctified knowledge, the greater the capacity for evil.

The more false profession, the more treachery.

II. SOME OF THESE WE HAVE KNOWN.

These marshes are at no great distance. They constitute an eye-sore, and a heart-sore, near at hand.

1. The talkative man, who lives in sin: flooded with knowledge, but destitute of love: fluent expression but no experience.
2. Those critics who note only the faults of Christians, and are quick to dwell on them; but are false themselves.
3. Those who receive orthodox truth, and yet love the world.
4. Those who feel impressed and moved, but never obey the word. They delight to hear the gospel, and only the gospel, and yet they have no spiritual life.

5. Those who are mere officials, and attend to religion in a mechanical manner. Judas is both treasurer and traitor, apostle and apostate. His descendants are among us.

III. SUCH PERSONS ARE IN A TERRIBLE PLIGHT.

Their condition is more than commonly dreadful.

1. Because they are not aware of it: they think it is well with them.
2. Because the ordinary means of blessing men have failed in their case. That which is a river of life to others is not so to them.
3. In some instances the very best means have failed. A special river of gracious opportunity has flowed down to them, but its streams have visited them in vain.
4. No known means now remain: "What shall I do unto thee?" What more can be hoped for from the economy of mercy?
5. Their ruin appears certain: they will be given over; left to themselves to be barren marshes.
6. Their ruin is as terrible as it is sure: much like that of the cities of the plain—given to salt; only their doom will be less tolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

IV. FROM THESE WE MAY LEARN—

1. A lesson of warning, lest we ourselves be visibly visited by grace-streams, and yet never profit thereby.

2. A lesson of arousing, lest we rest in ordinances, which in themselves are not necessarily a saving blessing.
3. A lesson of gratitude: if we are indeed healed by the life-river, let us bless the effectual grace of the Lord our God.
4. A lesson of quickening to ministers and other workers, that they may look well to the results of their labor, and not be making marshes where they wish to create fields rich with harvest.

Apropos.

No persons appear less likely to be saved than your religious unbelievers. They wear an armor of proof. You cannot tell them anything new and striking, their heads are helmeted with religious knowledge; you cannot touch their hearts, for they wear the breast-plate of gospel-hardening. They bow assent to every truth, and yet believe nothing; they attend to every religious observance, and yet have no religion. No other suit of plate armor is one half so effective for warding off the strokes of truth as that which is forged in the arsenals of religion. I have more hope of an avowed infidel than of a gospel-proof hearer.—*C. H. S.*

Either the waters came not to these marshes; or if they did, they refused them, and so were given to salt, made like Sodom, barren and accursed. Some places have not the waters of the sanctuary, the

doctrine of the gospel, and they are barren, and perish for want of the same, as Tyre and Sidon. Other places have them, and because they are impenitent, and will not receive the truth with the love of it, because they will not drink in these waters, therefore they are given to salt, they are barren, and must perish. So it was with Capernaum and Jerusalem (Matt. xi. 23, and xxiii. 37, 38); and so is it with many places in this nation, I fear.—*William Greenhill.*

Certain persons are to be met with, at revival services, who are the first to enter the enquiry-room, but when full enquiry is made about their history it will be found that they are old practitioners, and have undergone conversion of a sort many times before. These are the plague and disgrace of a religious awakening. Easily affected, their piety itself is an affectation: they are not exactly hypocrites, but yet there is so little depth in them that they are next door to it. We heard of one who had been healed of lameness, so he said, but within a few days he took to his crutches again, and thereby cast grave doubt upon the professed healer. Even thus do these wretched converts raise a cry against admirable movements. They are a sort of people whom even the gospel does not bless,—marshes, which even the river of life does not fertilize.

Who is the most miserable man on earth, and whither shall we go to seek him? Not to the tavern; not to the theatre; not even to the brothel; but to

the church! That man, who has sat, Sabbath after Sabbath, under the awakening and affecting calls of the gospel, and has hardened his heart against these calls, he is the man whose condition is the most desperate of all others. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shall be thrust down to hell."—*Richard Cecil.*

The Latins used to say, "The corruption of what is best is the worst of all things."

Of all compounds of human weakness and depravity, the most repulsive is a bonfire of religious cant, which is all feeling and no principle, all talk and no character, all prayer and no life, all Sunday and no week-day. "Ye whited sepulchres!" "Ye generation of vipers!" The holiest of men join the indignant outcry of the world against such nauseating hypocrisy. That is a wise and always timely petition of the Church of England: "From the *deceits* of the world, from the *crafts* of the devil, good Lord, deliver us!"—*Austin Phelps.*

XCVII.

"His thoughts troubled him."—*Dan.* v. 6.

TO many men *thinking* is an unusual employment.

Yet it is a distinction of man that he can think.

No wonder that when thought is forced on some men they are troubled.

This trouble from thought is salutary: by it conviction and conversion may come; and, in any case, troubled thought is as the sounding of the tocsin, arousing the mind, and warning the soul.

Let us think of Belshazzar, and of ourselves. Of us, too, it may have been said, "His thoughts troubled him." We must be in a bad way if we dare not face our own thoughts about ourselves. What must God's thoughts of us be?

I. It did not appear likely that his thoughts would trouble him.

1. He was an irresponsible and reckless monarch. He came of a fierce nation, and was born of a father who had been punished for his haughty spirit.
2. He had hardened his heart with pride (verses 22 and 23). Daniel said, "thou hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven."

3. He was drinking wine, and it had worked upon him (verse 2).
4. He was rioting in gay company: "his princes, his wives, and his concubines." Such comrades as these usually chase all thought away, and help their leader in his recklessness.
5. He was venturing far in profanity (verse 3); daring to abuse the sacred vessels, in his banquets, as an expression of his contempt for Israel's God, whom he despised in contrast with his "gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." Perhaps he had mentioned these in detail as the gods who had triumphed; at any rate, the prophet brings them forward with detestation in verse 4.

No man is rendered wise or thoughtful by the wine-cup.

No man is out of the reach of the arrows of God.

No conscience is so dead that he cannot arouse it.

Many other men in far lower positions exhibit equal pride of station and success; this is stimulated in much the same manner, and exhibited with much the same contempt for the things of God.

A parallel is easily drawn between Belshazzar and other proud ones.

II. YET WELL MIGHT HIS THOUGHTS TROUBLE HIM.

1. For what he saw was appalling: "fingers of a

man's hand over against the candlestick" (verse 5).

God sometimes gives men warnings which they *must* notice.

2. For what he could not see was suggestive. Where was the hand?

Where was the writer? What had he written? What did it mean? A terrible mystery was involved in his vision.

God gives men hints of something behind, which is yet to appear.

3. For what he had done was alarming.

His own past flashed before him. His cruel wars, oppressions, blasphemies and vices.

What he knew of his father's career increased his terror.

What he had himself failed to do came before him: "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified" (verse 23).

What he was then in the act of doing startled him. He was wantonly defying Jehovah, the God of Israel.

See *him* trembling before whom all trembled.

He has drunk a strange draught out of those holy cups.

III. AND MIGHT NOT YOUR THOUGHTS TROUBLE SOME OF YOU?

1. You are careless, riotous, fond of feasts, given to much wine. Does wantonness ever end well?

2. You are prosperous. Are not beasts fattened for the slaughter?
3. You are trifling with holy things. You neglect, or ridicule, or use without seriousness the things of God. Will this be endured? Will not the Lord be provoked to avenge this contempt?
4. You mix with the impure. Will you not perish with them?
5 Your father's history might instruct you, or at least trouble you.
6. The sacred writing "over against the candlestick" is against you. Read the Holy Scripture, and see for yourself.
7. Specially, you have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting. Conscience beholds the scales in the hand of the infallible Judge.

Take heed that you do not fall into Belshazzar's condition, to whom Daniel gave no counsel, but simply interpreted the sentences which sealed his doom.

As yet we dare preach the gospel to you, and we do. God's thoughts are above your thoughts. He bids you repent of sin, and believe in his Son Jesus; and then your thoughts will cease to trouble you.

Thoughts and Facts.

Conscience, from inaction, is like a withered arm in the souls of many; but the Lord of conscience

will one day say to it, "Be thou stretched forth, and do thine appointed work."

Such mystery of iniquity within,
That we must loathe our very thoughts, but for the cure
He hath devised,—the blessed Tree
The Lord hath shown us, that, cast in, can heal
The fountain whence the bitter waters flow.
Divinest remedy
Whose power we feel,
Whose grace we comprehend not, but we know.
—*Miss Havergal.*

As the ant-hill, when stirred, sets in motion its living insects in every direction, so the conscience of the sinner, disturbed by the Spirit, or judgments of God, calls up before its vision thousands of deeds which fill the soul with agony and woe.—*McCosh.*

The Duke of Wellington once said that he could have saved the lives of a thousand men a year, had he had chaplains, or any religious ministers. The uneasiness of their minds reacted on their bodies, and kept up continual fever, once it seized upon their frames. It is our blessed office to tell of One who can "minister to a mind diseased," whose grace can deliver from "an evil conscience," and through whom all inward fear and trouble are removed.

Charles IX. of France, in his youth, had humane and tender sensibilities. The fiend who had tempted him was the mother who had nursed him. When she first proposed to him the massacre of the Huguenots, he shrunk from it with horror: "No, no,

madam! They are my loving subjects." *Then* was the critical hour of his life. Had he cherished that natural sensitiveness to bloodshed, St. Bartholomew's Eve would never have disgraced the history of his kingdom, and he himself would have escaped the fearful remorse which crazed him on his death-bed. To his physician he said in his last hours, "Asleep or awake, I see the mangled forms of the Huguenots passing before me. They drip with blood. They make hideous faces at me. They point to their open wounds and mock me. Oh, that I had spared at least the little infants at the breast!" Then he broke out in agonizing cries and screams. Bloody sweat oozed from the pores of his skin. He was one of the very few cases in history which confirm the possibility of the phenomenon which attended our Lord's anguish in Gethsemane. That was the fruit of resisting, years before, the recoil of his youthful conscience from the extreme of guilt.—*Austin Phelps.*

XCVIII.

"NOW THEREFORE, O OUR GOD, HEAR THE PRAYER OF THY SERVANT, AND HIS SUPPLICATIONS, AND CAUSE THY FACE TO SHINE UPON THY SANCTUARY THAT IS DESOLATE, FOR THE LORD'S SAKE."—*Daniel* ix. 17.

THIS true-hearted man lived not for himself. Daniel was a fervent lover of his country.

He had been personally faithful, and in consequence he had been honored, but he did not rest content with personal ease.

He had visions of God, but he was not visionary.

He had searched and studied, but now he prayed. Supplication should ever be the outcome of our meditation.

His prayer is instructive to us.

It suggests our fervent entreaties for the church of God in these days.

I. THE HOLY PLACE. "Thy sanctuary."

The temple was typical, and for our edification we shall read the text as if the spiritual house had been meant. There are many points in the type worthy of notice, but these may suffice:—

1. The temple was unique; and as there could only be one temple for Jehovah, so there is but one church.

2. The temple was "exceeding magnifical;" and in the eyes of God, and of holy beings, the church is the house of God's glory.
3. The temple was the fabric of wisdom. King Solomon built it; and of the church we may say, "a greater than Solomon is here."
4. The temple was the result of great cost and vast labor: so was the church builded by the Lord Jesus at a cost which can never be estimated.
5. The temple was the shrine of God's indwelling.
6. The temple was the place of his worship.
7. The temple was the throne of his power: his word went forth from Jerusalem; there he ruled his people, and routed his foes.

The church of Jesus Christ in the latter day shall be more accurately the anti-type of the temple, as the present church is of the tabernacle in the wilderness.

II. THE EARNEST PRAYER. "Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate.

1. It rose above all selfishness. This was his one prayer, the centre of all his prayers.
2. It was the child of thought (verse 2).
   He had thought over the sins, calamities, prospects of his people.
   Such prayers show the way in which a man's mind is running, and are more full of force than unprepared expressions.
3. It cast itself upon God. "O our God."
4. It was a confession that he could do nothing of

himself. Honest men do not ask God to do what they can do themselves.

5 It asked a comprehensive boon. "Cause thy face to shine."

This would mean many things which we also implore for the church of God.

(1.) Walls rebuilt and securely standing.

(2.) Ministers in their places, faithful in their service.

(3.) Worship presented with acceptance.

(4.) Truth proclaimed in its clearness. God's face cannot shine upon falsehood or equivocation.

(5.) Holiness displayed in its beauty. Where the Holy God is smiling, his servants holy.

(6.) Delight in fellowship: the saints walking are with God.

(7.) Power in testimony. When God is pleased, his word is mighty, and all holy endeavors are prospered.

6. It asked needful things.

For the church; unity, life, purity, power, joy, etc.

For the world; enlightenment and conversion. A desolate church is a defeated church.

For ourselves; edification. We cannot prosper in soul when Zion languishes.

For our children; salvation. Our sons and daughters are not likely to be saved in a desolate church.

7. It asked with a mighty plea: "For the Lord' sake."

III. THE CONSISTENT CONDUCT. This is suggested by such a prayer.

1. Let us consider the state of Zion (verse 23). Let us form a careful estimate of the condition of true religion.
2. Let us lay it earnestly to heart. Whether for joy or sorrow, let the condition of the church concerns us deeply.
3. Let us do all we can for her, or our prayer will be a mockery.
4. Let us do nothing to grieve the Lord; for all depends upon his smile. "Cause thy face to shine."
5. Let us pray much more than we have done. Let each one of us be a Daniel.

INCITEMENTS.

During the troublous times of Scotland, when the Popish court and aristocracy were arming themselves to suppress the Reformation in that land, and the cause of Protestant Christianity was in imminent peril, late on a certain night John Knox was seen to leave his study, and to pass from the house down into an enclosure to the rear of it. He was followed by a friend, when, after a few moments of silence, his voice was heard as if in prayer. In another moment the accents deepened into intelligible words, and the

earnest petition went up from his struggling soul to heaven, "O Lord, give me Scotland, or I die!" Then a pause of hushed stillness, when again the petition broke forth, "O Lord, give me Scotland, or I die!" Once more all was voiceless and noiseless, when, with a yet intenser pathos the thrice-repeated intercession struggled forth, "O Lord, give me Scotland, or I die!" And God gave him Scotland, in spite of Mary and her Cardinal Beatoun: a land and a church of noble loyalty to Christ and his crown.

"At the time the Diet of Nuremburg was held," says *Tholuck*, "Luther was earnestly praying in his own dwelling; and at the very hour when the edict, granting full toleration to all Protestants, was issued, he ran out of his house, crying out, 'We have gained the victory.'"

The church may be sick, yet not die. Die it cannot, for the blood of an eternal King bought it, the power of an eternal Spirit preserves it, and the mercy of an eternal God shall crown it.—*Thomas Adams.*

Prayer was a universal habit among the heathen people of Samoa, and they manifested considerable intelligence in their conception of prayer. For example, when on their boat-journeys, those who were sitting as passengers in the boat were expected to pray for those who were plying the paddles. The passengers would repeatedly thank the rowers in these words: "Thanks for your strong strokes;"

to which the rowers immediately made answer "Thanks for your intercessory prayers," recognizing, it will be seen, the principle that their power to ply the paddles was dependent upon the prayers of the passengers.—*The Congregationalist.*

XCIX.

"THEREFORE, BEHOLD, I WILL HEDGE UP THY WAY WITH THORNS, AND MAKE A WALL, THAT SHE SHALL NOT FIND HER PATHS.

"AND SHE SHALL FOLLOW AFTER HER LOVERS, BUT SHE SHALL NOT OVERTAKE THEM; AND SHE SHALL SEEK THEM, BUT SHALL NOT FIND THEM; THEN SHALL SHE SAY, I WILL GO AND RETURN TO MY FIRST HUSBAND; FOR THEN WAS IT BETTER WITH ME THAN NOW."—*Hosea* ii. 6, 7.

THIS is a parenthesis of mercy in a passage of threatening.

It relates to a people to whom the Lord was united by bonds of covenant love, who had, nevertheless, been faithless and rebellious.

Strangely enough, it begins with a "*therefore;*" and the logic of it lies in the immutable resolve of the unchanging God never to renounce his covenant, nor utterly to cast away his chosen; as, also, in his unchangeable determination to win them to himself.

The words might still be spoken in reference to the chosen but sinning people of God.

Let us note carefully,—

I. THE STUBBORN CHARACTER OF MANY SINNERS.

This appears in their case, as in that of Israel, in several ways:—

1. Ordinary means have missed their aim. The details are given in previous verses; and

then we read "therefore:" showing that because of former failures the Lord is about to try further measures.

2. Extraordinary means are now to be used, and attention is called to their speciality by the word "behold." God's wonderful ways of grace prove the wonderful obstinacy of sinners.
3. Even these means are to fail. Providence uses strange ways, like making hedges and walls; and yet for a while the sinner defeats the gracious design. "She shall follow after her lovers," etc. Men will leap hedges, and scale walls, to get at their darling sins.
4. Only divine power can overcome the hardened one. God saith, "I will," and adds "she shall not," and "she shall;" proving that the omnipotence of love had now entered the lists, and intended to conquer the rebellious and obstinate transgressor. God himself must personally interpose, or none will turn to him.

What sinners those must be whom neither hedge nor wall will stop unless God be there also in omnipotence of grace!

II. THE MEANS WHICH GOD USES TO RECLAIM THEM.

These, when used by God himself, become effectual, though they would have accomplished nothing of themselves.

1. Sharp afflictions: "I will hedge up thy way with thorns." Many are checked and made to think by being made to smart. Travellers tell us of the "wait-a-bit thorn," which puzzles the most cautious walker. When in full pursuit of evil, the Lord can bring the sinner to a pause.
2. Insurmountable difficulties: "and make a wall." The Lord of love places effectual stoppages in the road of those whom he means to save: if men break down hedges, his persevering love builds walls, so that they may find it hard to persevere in sin.
3. Blinding perplexities: "she shall not find her paths." He can make the ways of sinful pleasure to be difficult and bewildering, till even the broad road seems to be barricaded.
4. Utter failures: "she shall follow after, but not overtake." We know persons with whom nothing is going right; even the utmost diligence in their case fails to secure prosperity: and all because their ways are not pleasing to God, and he means to bring them out of them. Such men hunt after sinful success, but it flees from them.
5. Bitter disappointments: "she shall seek them, but shall not find them." Pleasure shall be no longer found by them even in those amusements where once it danced around them.

These severe chastenings are frequently made

useful in the early days of religious impression: they are the ploughing before the sowing.

III. THE BLESSED RESULT WHICH IS AT LAST ATTAINED.

The wandering, wanton spirit is led to return to her God.

1. Remembrance aroused: "it was better with me."
2. Confession of sad loss extorted: "then was it better with me *than now*." She thinks upon happier times, now that her days are clouded over.
3. Resolution formed: "I will go and return."
4. Affection stirred: "I will return to my first husband."

She owns the bands of love; she sorrows that she has strained them so terribly.

When the matter has come so far, the sad breach is healed, the work of reclaiming love is done.

Let us turn to the Lord before he uses thorns to stop us.

If already hedged up, let us consider our ways.

In any case, let us by faith turn to Jesus, and rest in him.

CUTTINGS.

"*I will hedge up thy way.*"—There is a two-fold hedge that God makes about his people. There is the hedge of protection, to keep evil from them; and the hedge of affliction, to keep them from evil.

The hedge of protection you have in Isa. v. 5, where God threatens that he "will take away the hedge" from his vineyard; and it is said of Job that God had "hedged him about." But the hedge here meant is the hedge of affliction. "I will hedge up thy way," that is, I will bring sore and heavy afflictions upon you to keep you from evil.

When a husbandman sees passengers make a path in his ground where they ought not, and so spoil the grass or the corn, he lays thorns in the way that they cannot go into his corn; or if they do, they shall go with some pain and trouble: "so," saith God, "I will hedge up thy way with thorns."—*Jeremiah Burroughs.*

Consider the good effects of a wounded conscience, privative for the present, and positive for the future. First, privative; this heaviness of thy heart (for the time being) is a bridle to thy soul, keeping it from many sins it would otherwise commit. Thou that now sittest sad in thy shop, or standest sighing in thy chamber, mightest perchance at this time be drunk, or wanton, or worse, if not restrained by this affliction. God saith to Judah, "I will hedge up thy way with thorns," namely, to keep Judah from committing spiritual fornication. A wounded conscience is a hedge of thorns; but this thorny fence keeps our wild spirits in the true way, which otherwise would be straggling; and it is better to be held in the right road with briars and brambles than to

wander on beds of roses in a wrong path which leads to destruction.—*Thomas Fuller.*

A popular and successful young minister in America became entangled in the meshes of infidelity, left the pulpit, joined an infidel club, and derided the name he had preached to others as the Saviour of the world. But he sickened, and came to his death-bed. His friends gathered round him, and tried to comfort him with their cold and icy theories, but in vain. The old thought came back to him—the old experience came before him. He said, "Wife, bring me my Greek Testament." Upon his bed he turned to the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. When he had finished the chapter, great tears of joy rolled down his cheeks. He closed the book, and said, "Wife, back again at last upon the old rock to die."

O.

"THEREFORE, BEHOLD, I WILL ALLURE HER, AND BRING HER INTO THE WILDERNESS, AND SPEAK COMFORTABLY UNTO HER."—*Hosea* ii. 14.

IN the former part of the chapter we find words of accusation and threatening most justly uttered towards a guilty nation.

In this second portion we come to a passage of unmixed grace.

The person dealt with is the same, but she is dealt with under another dispensation, even that covenant of grace of which we find an abstract in verse 23.

God, intending to deal with his sinful people in love, speaks words which are of the most extraordinary tenor.

I. HERE IS, FOR HIS DEEDS OF LOVE, A REASON BEYOND ALL REASON.

The text begins with "therefore." God always has a reason.

The context describes the grossest sin, and how should God find a reason there?

1. God finds a reason for grace where there is none. Why else did he bless Israel, or any one of us?
2. God makes a reason which overrides all other

reasons. Because his people will persist in being so evil, he will display more love till he wins them from their wanderings.

3. God creates a reason *for* out of reasons *against*. "She forgat me, saith the Lord. Therefore I will allure her." (See all preceding verses.) The great sin which is in itself a reason for judgment is by divine grace turned into an argument for mercy.

4. God justifies his own reasoning with men by a reason. According to the margin, "I will speak to her heart," is the promise of the text, and the Lord gives a "*therefore*" for it. He has a gracious reason for reasoning with us in love.

The sovereign grace of God had chosen his people, and his immutable love resolves to win this people to itself, *therefore* it sets about the work.

II. HERE IS A METHOD OF POWER BEYOND ALL POWER. "I will allure her."

1. Allurement of love surpasses in power all other forces.

It appears that other methods had been used, such as—

Affliction with its thorny hedge (verse 6).

Instruction with all its practical application (verse 8).

Deprivation even of necessaries (verse 9).

Exposure of sin beyond all denial (verse 10).

Sorrow upon sorrow (verses 11 and 12).

The sweet allurement of tenderness would succeed where these failed.

2. Allurement of love overcomes the will to resist.
   Assaulted we defend, allured we yield.
3. Allurement of grace has many conquering weapons.
   The person, work, offices, and love of Jesus lead men captive.
   The freeness and abundance of divine pardon vanquish opposition.
   The grace and truth of the covenant defy resistance.
   The adoption and inheritance so graciously bestowed subdue the heart by overwhelming force of gratitude.
   The sense of present peace, and the prospect of future glory, allure us beyond all things.

III. HERE IS A CONDITION OF COMPANY BEYOND ALL COMPANY.

1. She is made to be alone. Free from tempting, distracting, or assisting company. All her lovers far from her. Her hope in them is gone.
2. Alone with God. He becomes her trust, desire, aim, love.
3. Alone as in the wilderness. Illustrate by Israel, who, in the wilderness, knew the Lord as Deliverer, Guide, Guard, Light, Manna, Physician, Champion, central Glory, and King.

4. Alone for the same purpose as Israel, for training, growth, illumination, and preparation for the promised rest: above all that they might be the Lord's own separated ones.

IV. HERE IS A VOICE OF COMFORT BEYOND ALL COMFORT. "And speak comfortably to her."

1. Real comfort is given to souls alone with God. The divine speech is applied to the heart, and so its comfort is understood, and appropriated, and effectually touches the affections.

2. Abundant comfort is bestowed, received and acknowledged,—

By renewed gratitude: "she shall sing there as in the days of her youth." See verse 15.

By a more confiding spirit: "thou shalt call me Ishi," &c. See verses 16 and 17.

By an established peace. See verse 18.

By a clearer revelation of eternal love. See verses 19 and 20.

By a surer sense of the eternal future, and its marriage-union of endless bliss; for betrothal prophesies marriage.

Now let all this be known and felt, and we are sure the heart is won: there can be no revolting after this.

Let the prayer of each one of us be,—

O heavenly love, my heart subdue,
I would be led in triumph too;
Allured to live for God alone,
And bow submissive at his throne.

Jottings.

When God's free grace has pitched upon its object, it often solicits that soul in its own peculiar way: I mean that grace woos and wins by its own graciousness, it conquers not by arms but by allurement. Have you not seen a mother allure her child to run into her bosom with the promise of a kiss? Have you never heard the little birds alluring their mates with rapturous song? Know you not the way of love by which it wins its victories? If so, you also understand why the beloved one is to be spoken with in the wilderness. Love is shy, and shuns the crowd: solitude is her element. When a soul is made to be alone with God, it shall hear many things which for the present could not be spoken to it. Speaking to the heart is reserved for retirement; it were not meet to display the secrets of divine communion to a mingled concourse. Understand, therefore, O lonely one, why thou art made to be one by thyself; and now surrender thy heart to the sacred allurements of sovereign grace!—*C. H. S.*

Some years ago an affecting incident was reported in reference to the ex-Empress Charlotte, an Austrian princess, whose husband was for a short time Emperor of Mexico. In the year 1867 he was shot by the revolutionists, and his unhappy widow became the victim of melancholy madness, which her physicians gave up all hope of curing. As in similar cases, she returned to the tastes and habits of childhood, one of which was a passion for flowers, and

she spent most of her time over them. Their attractiveness for her was touchingly manifested on the occasion in question, when, having eluded the watch of her attendants, she had fled from the castle. When overtaken it was found impossible to induce her to return, except by the use of means which would certainly have proved hurtful. One of her physicians happily bethought himself of her intense affection for flowers; and by showing them from time to time before her, she was gradually lured on her way back to her home. May not this story be taken as an illustration of the way in which God allures wandering souls back to himself by the invitations and promises of the gospel?

CI.

"I WILL HAVE MERCY UPON HER THAT HAD NOT OBTAINED MERCY; AND I WILL SAY TO THEM WHICH WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, THOU ART MY PEOPLE; AND THEY SHALL SAY, THOU ART MY GOD."—*Hosea* ii. 23.

"AS HE SAITH ALSO IN OSEE, I WILL CALL THEM MY PEOPLE, WHICH WERE NOT MY PEOPLE; AND HER BELOVED, WHICH WAS NOT BELOVED. AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID UNTO THEM, YE ARE NOT MY PEOPLE; THERE SHALL THEY BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF THE LIVING GOD."—*Romans* ix. 25, 26.

WE accept the supreme authority of Holy Scripture: every word of it is truth to us.

Yet we attach special weight to words which are the personal utterance of the Lord God; as in this case, where God himself is the Speaker, in the first person.

Still more are we impressed when a divine message is repeated; as in this instance, where Paul writes:—"As he saith also in Osee."

God "saith" still what he said long ago.

Come then, anxious souls, and hear the story of God's grace to his chosen, in the hope that he may do the like for you.

Observe with attention, concerning the Lord's people,—

I. THEIR ORIGINAL STATE: "not obtained mercy,—not my people."

1. They not only were not "beloved," but *they were expressly disowned.* "It was said unto them, ye are not my people." Their claim, if they made any, was negatived.

This is the worst that can be: worse than to be left alone.

This, conscience, providence, and the Word of God all appear to say to men who persist in sin.

2. They had no approval of God.

They were not numbered with his people.

They were not "beloved," in the sense of the love of complacency.

3. They had not in the highest sense "obtained mercy."

For they were under providential judgment.

That judgment had not become a blessing to them.

They had not even sought for mercy.

4. They were the types of a people who as yet—

Have felt no application of the blood of Jesus;

Have known no renewing work of the Spirit;

Have obtained no relief by prayer; perhaps have not prayed;

Have enjoyed no comfort of the promises;

Have known no communion with God;

And possess no hope of heaven, or preparation for it.

It is a terrible description, including all the unsaved.

It is concerning certain of such that the unconditional promise is made in the text: "I will call them my people." Who these are shall be seen in due time by their repentance and faith, which shall be wrought in them by the Spirit of God. There are such people, and this fact is our encouragement in preaching the gospel, for we perceive that our labor will not be in vain.

II. THEIR NEW CONDITION. "Thou art my people."

1. Mercy is promised: "I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy." This is absolutely free.
2. A divine revelation is pronounced: "I will say, Thou art my people."
   This is done by the Spirit of God in the heart.
   This is supported by gracious dealings in the life.
3. A hearty response shall be given: "they shall say, Thou art my God." The Holy Ghost will lead them to this free acceptance.
   As a whole, they will say this with one voice.
   Each individual will say it for himself in the singular, "Thou."
4. A declaration of love shall be made: "I will call her beloved, which was not beloved." (Rom. ix. 25.) Love shall be enjoyed.
5. This shall be perceived by others: "There shall they be called the children of the living God."

Their likeness to God shall make them to be called the children of God, even as the peacemakers in Matthew v. 9.

Thus every blessing shall be theirs, surely, personally, everlastingly.

Reflections arising from all this:—

We must give up none as hopeless; even though they be marked out by terrible evidence to be not the people of God.

None may give up themselves in despair.

Sovereign grace is the ultimate hope of the fallen.

Let them trust in a God so freely gracious, so omnipotent to save, so determined to bring in those whom it seemed that even he, himself, had disowned, whom everybody had abandoned as not the people of God.

NOTABILIA.

"Have you ever heard the gospel before?" asked an Englishman, at Ningpo, of a respectable Chinaman, whom he had not seen in his mission-room before.

"No," he replied, "but I have *seen* it. I know a man who used to be the terror of his neighborhood. If you gave him a hard word, he would shout at you, and curse you for two days and nights without ceasing. He was as dangerous as a wild beast, and a bad opium-smoker; but when the religion of Jesus

took hold of him, he became wholly changed. He is gentle, moral, not soon angry, and has left off opium. Truly, the teaching is good!"—*Word and Work.*

It will give a kind of exaltation to the saint's happiness to look down upon that moral depth from which he was taken. A man on the edge of a precipice, *at night*, cannot clearly see it; but when the morning dawns, he will be able to see the danger he has been in. So the saint cannot, while on earth, conceive the depth of sin from which he has been raised; but he will be able to measure it by the light of heaven, and he may go down ages before he comes to the place where he once was: and then to think what *he is*—how deep once, but how high now—it will augment the sense of happiness and glory:—and then to recollect *who* has been the cause—and every time he looks down at what he was, it will give greater emphasis to the ascription, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."—*John Foster.*

The announcement made by Brownlow North to his old friends of his sudden change, whether orally or in writing, created no small sensation among them. Some thought he had gone out of his mind, others thought it was a temporary impression or excitement, and that it would soon pass off; and this was specially the case with those of them who were acquainted with his previous convictions, and tem-

porary reformation, while in some of the newspapers, it was even said, after he began his public work, that the whole thing was done for a wager, and that he had taken a bet to gather a certain number of thousands or tens of thousands of hearers in a given time. So little do carnal men understand the workings of the Spirit of God, even when they see the most striking and manifest proofs of it.—*From Brownlow North's Life-story, by Rev. K. Moody-Stuart, M. A.*

CII.

"FOR THEY HAVE SOWN THE WIND, AND THEY SHALL REAP THE WHIRLWIND: IT HATH NO STALK: THE BUD SHALL YIELD NO MEAL: IF SO BE IT YIELD, THE STRANGERS SHALL SWALLOW IT UP."—*Hosea* viii. 7.

LIFE is a seed-time. Of all men it may be said, "they have sown."

Prudent men put the question, "What will the harvest be?"

The hope of harvest is the joyful encouragement of the righteous.

The certainty of harvest should be a solemn warning to the godless.

It is well to follow worldly lives to their issues that we may avoid them. Here we see what evil seed will produce.

I. THE RESULT OF CERTAIN SOWINGS WILL BE TERRIBLE. "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."

The sowing was careless, or mischievous, or changeable; and the harvest was of the same reckless, ruthless, mingled character, only terribly intensified. Wind grew into whirlwind.

1. Vicious men sow their wild oats, and we need not say what they reap. The debauched,

drunken, and profligate are around us, bearing already in their own persons the first-fruits of the fearful harvest of transgression.

2. Oppressors in a nation are sure to be repaid with revolt, bloodshed, etc., as may be seen in the French revolution, and many other dreadful historical incidents. Wars bring an awful harvest of poverty and death. Oh, that our nation would cease to be so eager for the fray!

3. Immoral theories go far beyond their original intent. The speculation was an airy nothing, but the outcome is a whirlwind, breaking down all that is built up.

4. Heresies in the church also lead to unexpected evils. Apparently trifling errors grow to grievous evils. The use of a symbol developes into idolatry. A little laxity increases into absolute immorality. Small disputes lead on to heart-burnings and divisions.

5. Tolerance of sin in a family is a fruitful source of overwhelming evil. See the case of Eli. Mind it is not your own.

6. Toleration of sin in yourself. Occasional indulgence becomes habit, and habit is as the Simoom of the desert, before which life expires, and hope is swept away. Even allowable acts may grow into dangerous excess.

Let no man think that he can measure, much less

limit, the consequences of sin as to himself, his family, the church, or the world. When once the winds are up, who can still them?

II. THE RESULT OF SOME SOWINGS IS MANIFEST FAILURE. "It hath no stalk."

The seed feebly tries to grow, but it comes to nothing.

1. Self-conceit vainly endeavors to produce a reputation.
2. Self-righteousness strives unsuccessfully to obtain salvation.
3. Human wisdom idly struggles to make a new gospel.
4. Mere idlers and talkers affect to be useful, but it is a delusion. What appears to be accomplished soon vanishes away. Great talk, but "no stalk."
5. He who spends his life without faith in Christ, and obedience to his will, may dream of a happy future, but he will be deceived: "it hath no stalk."

Wherefore do men live for folly, and dote on vanity?

III. THE RESULT OF MANY SOWINGS IS UNSATISFACTORY. "The bud shall yield no meal."

"The devil's meal is all bran," so they say, and it is true.

1. The man lived for pleasure, and found satiety.
2. He lived for fame, and gathered vanity.

3. He lived for self and found misery.
4. He lived by his own works and religiousness, but reaped no peace of mind, and no real salvation.

IV. THE RESULT OF MANY SOWINGS IS PERSONAL DISAPPOINTMENT. "If so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up."

1. The man spends his life as a common toiler, who earns much for his master, but nothing for himself, and this is a poor result if there be no higher object in life.
2. He invents, devises, and commences, but another gains the profit.
3. He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. His heirs forget him, and strangers swallow up his savings without gratitude.

Without God, nothing is wise, or strong, or worth the doing.

Only to live unto God is a wise sowing.

May the Lord destroy utterly all our sowings to the flesh, lest we reap corruption! Gal. vi. 8.

May the Lord Jesus supply us with good seed, and bless us in the sowing! Oh, for a consecrated life!

INCIDENTS.

An Eastern apologue tells us of Abdallah, to whom an evil spirit came at first as a fly, sipping an atom of syrup. He did not drive away the creature, and to his surprise it increased to the size of a locust.

Being further indulged, the creature went on growing, and made such rapid increase that it became an enormous monster, devoured his substance, and in the end murdered him, leaving in the garden, where it slew its victim, a footprint six cubits long. Thus does sin grow upon men, till it becomes a giant habit, and slays them.

Augustine tells us of a young man who thought that the devil had made flies, and such like tiny things. By the influence of this apparently insignificant error, he was led on, step by step, till in the end he ascribed everything to Satan, and ceased to believe in God. Thus does error sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind. Scrupulous correctness of faith is as much a duty as careful practice in morals.

David Hume, the historian, philosopher, and sceptic, spent his life in traducing the Word of God. In his last moments he joked with those around him; but the intervals were filled up with sadness. He wrote, "I am affrighted and confounded with the forlorn solitude in which I am placed by my philosophy. When I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance. Where am I, and what? I begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environed in the deepest darkness." —*New Cyclopædia of Anecdote.*

The history of the Rev. Caleb Colton, M.A., the author of "Lacon," may serve as a striking illustration of the truth of our text. He was a clergyman

at Tiverton, popular and clever, but very fond of field-sports. One day, however, a friend suddenly expired while uttering most impious language. The awe-struck minister abjured dogs and guns, and vowed to live henceforth for his sacred calling. For months his preaching was earnest, but at the end of that time he resumed the sporting life. He had, moreover, acquired a love for gambling. A presentation to the vicarage of Kew and Petersham brought him to London, and while numbers were reading with delight his "Lacon; or, Many Things in Few Words; addressed to those who think," the wretched author was sitting far into the night among swindlers. His passion for play involving him in pecuniary difficulties, he was forced to abscond, and his living was declared void. After leading a vagabond life, he perished by his own hand at Fontainebleau, in 1832.

CIII.

"THEIR HEART IS DIVIDED; NOW SHALL THEY BE FOUND FAULTY."—*Hosea* x. 2.

ISRAEL, as a nation, divided its allegiance between Jehovah and Baal, and so became good for nothing, and was given up to captivity.

God has made one heart in man, and the attempt to have two, or to divide the one, is in every case injurious to man's life.

A church divided into parties, or differing in doctrine, becomes heretical, or contentious, or weak and useless.

A Christian, aiming at another object besides his Lord's glory, is sure to spend a poor, unprofitable life. He is an idolater, and his entire character will be faulty.

A seeker after Christ will never find him while his heart is hankering after sinful pleasures, or self-righteous confidences: his search is too faulty to be successful.

A minister, aiming at something else besides his one object, whether it be fame, learning, philosophy, rhetoric, or gain, will prove to be a very faulty servant of God.

In any case this heart-disease is a dire malady. A

broken heart is a blessing; but a divided heart is a mortal malady.

Let us seriously consider,—

I. THE DISEASE. "Their heart is divided"

This evil is to be seen—

1. In their idea of their state: they say they are "miserable sinners," but they believe themselves to be exceedingly respectable.
2. In the ground of their trust: they profess faith in Christ, and yet they rely upon self: they try to mix grace and works.
3. In the aim of their life: God and mammon, Christ and Belial, heaven and the world.
4. In the object of their love. It is Jesus and some earthly love. They cannot say "Jesus only."
5. In the decision of their will. They are never settled; they halt between two opinions; they do not know their own mind: they have two minds, and so no mind at all.

The disease complained of is in the central fountain of life, and it affects every part of their manhood. It is fearfully common, even in those who make a loud profession. If not cured it will end fatally, and perhaps suddenly, as heart-disease is very apt to do.

II. THE EVIL EFFECT OF IT. "Now shall they be found faulty."

In all sorts of ways the fault will show itself.

1. God is not loved at all when not wholly loved.

2. Christ is insulted when a rival is admitted.
3. No grace reigns within the soul if the heart be not wholly won.
4. The life limps and halts when it has not a whole heart behind it.
5. Before long the man goes over entirely to the wrong side.

The secret evil must sooner or later prove the whole profession to be faulty from beginning to end. It will be an awful thing if this be never discovered till death is close at hand.

III. ATTEMPTS AT A CURE.

Let it be seriously considered by the double-hearted man—

1. That he condemns himself by yielding so much of his heart to God. Why any if not all? Why go this way at all, if not all the way?
2. That his salvation will require all his thought and heart; for it is no trifling matter. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence:" Matt. xi. 12. The righteous scarcely are saved: 1 Pet. iv. 18.
3. That the blessing he seeks is worthy of all his soul and strength.
4. That Jesus gave his whole heart to our redemption, and therefore it is not consistent for us to be half-hearted.
5. That all potent beings in the universe are undivided in heart.

Bad men are eager for their pleasure, gains, &c.

The devil works evil with his whole power.
Good men are zealous for Christ.
God is earnest to bless.

6. That faith in Christ is an act of the whole heart, and therefore a divided heart is not capable of saving faith, and consequently shuts itself off from the Saviour.

From this time forward pray that you may have an undivided heart.

Read, hear, pray, repent, believe with your whole heart, and you shall soon rejoice with all your heart.

Helps toward Application.

A minister in Brooklyn was recently called upon by a business man, who said to him, "I come, sir, to enquire if Jesus Christ will take me into the concern as a sleeping partner." "Why do you ask?" said the minister. "Because I wish to be a member of the firm, and do not wish anybody to know it." The reply was: "Christ takes no sleeping partners."

Some talk that the devil hath a cloven foot; but whatever the devil's foot be, to be sure his sons have a cloven heart: one half for God, the other half for sin; one half for Christ, the other half for this present world. God hath a corner in it, and the rest is for sin and the devil.—*Richard Alleine.*

As to the evil of being neither one thing nor the other, one finds an illustration in the water-ways of Southern China, which in winter-time are quite use-

less for purposes of commerce. The temperature is most tantalizing, for it is neither cold enough to freeze the canals, so that the ice would be able to bear traffic; nor warm enough to thaw them, so that they could be navigable by boats.

Some great king or potentate, having a mind to visit his imperial city, the harbinger is ordered to go before, and mark out a house suitable to entertain his majesty's retinue. The prince will only come to a house where he may dwell alone: if he cannot have the whole house, he will go elsewhere. The herald findeth one house where the master desireth to entertain the king, but he must have but one small chamber, wherein to lodge his wife and children. The herald will not accept his offer. Then he entreats the benefit of some by-place, to set up a trunk or two, full of richer goods than ordinary. "No," says the harbinger, "it cannot be; for if your house were as big again as it is, it would be little enough to entertain the king and all his royal train." So it is that every man's body is a temple of God, and his heart the *sanctum sanctorum* of that temple. His ministers are sent out into the world to inform us that Christ is coming to lodge there, and that we must clear the rooms, that this great King of glory may enter in. God will have the whole heart, the whole mind, the whole soul,—and all will be too little to entertain him, and the graces of his Holy Spirit, which are attendant on him. "Let it be neither mine nor thine; divide it:" was the voice of a

strange woman (1 Kings iii. 26), and such is that of the present world; but God will take nothing by halves: he will have the whole heart or nothing.—*John Spencer.*

On one occasion, when a former ruler of Montenegro was supposed to have received the offer of peace and a sum of money if he would acknowledge himself a vassal of the Porte, it is said that the chief men of the people waited on him to remind him that he was at perfect liberty to take service with the Sultan, but that no servant of the Sultan could be Gospodar of the Black Mountaineers.—*Travels in the Sclavonic Provinces of Turkey.*

CIV.

"SOW TO YOURSELVES IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, REAP IN MERCY; BREAK UP YOUR FALLOW GROUND: FOR IT IS TIME TO SEEK THE LORD, TILL HE COME AND RAIN RIGHTEOUSNESS UPON YOU."—*Hosea* x. 12.

WHAT should we think of a farmer who allowed his finest fields to lie fallow year after year?

Yet men neglect their souls; and besides being unprofitable, these inward fields become full of weeds, and exceedingly foul.

You see to everything else, will you not see to your souls?

It is God who calls you to break up the fallow ground of your uncultivated heart, and he waits to aid you therein.

Regard attentively the argument which he uses: "for it is time to seek the Lord." Thus God reasons with you. To this he adds instructions which deserve our best attention.

1. WHEN IS IT TIME? "It is time."
   1. In the very first hour of responsibility it is none too soon.
   2. At the present it is late, but not too late. "It is time."

3. When chastening has come, seek the Lord instantly; for now it is high time, "lest a worse thing come unto thee:" John v. 14.
4. Before trial comes, let mercy and gentleness lead to gratitude. Why should we need to be flogged to our God? Isa. i. 5.
5. Have you not sinned long enough? May not the time past suffice for us to have served the flesh? 1 Peter iv. 3.
6. When you assume great responsibilities, and enter on a new stage of life:—married, made a master, a father, etc.: 1 Chron. xxii. 19.
7. When God's Spirit is specially at work, and therefore others are saved. Acts iii. 19.

When you yourself feel holy stirrings in your conscience, and hope in your heart. Ps. xxvii. 8. 2 Sam. v. 24.

When the gospel is aimed at you by an earnest minister or friend.

II. WHAT IS THE PECULIAR WORK?—"to seek the Lord."

1. To draw nigh unto God; seeking him in worship, prayer, etc. Ps. cv. 4.
2. To ask pardon at his hands through the atonement of Jesus. Isa. lv. 6.
3. To obtain the blessings connected with the new birth. John i. 12, 13.
4. To live for his glory: seeking his honor in all things. Matt. vi. 33.

III. How long shall this be done? 'Till he come and reign righteousness upon you.'

1. Until the blessing of righteousness be obtained. "till he come."
2. Until it be plenteously received: "rain righteousness."
3. Until your soul is saturated: "rain righteousness *upon you.*"

Suppose a pause between the seeking and the blessing, do not look in some other direction, but seek the Lord still.

What else can you do? John vi. 68.

Is not God a Sovereign? May he not give when he pleases?

Even now some rain of grace falls on you. Be thankful for it.

Is it not worth waiting for this grace of life?

It is sure to come. He will come, and will not tarry. Heb. x. 37.

IV. What will come of it?

1. He will come. This is implied in the expression "till he come." God's coming in grace is all you need.
2. He will come in righteousness. You need purity and holiness, and he will bring these with him.
3. He will come in abundance of grace meeting your obedient sowing. Mark the precept, "Sow in righteousness." Then note the promise, "and rain righteousness upon you."

4. In consequence of the Lord's coming to you in righteousness, you shall "reap in mercy." With joy you shall gather the fruits of his love; not because of your own righteousness, but because of his righteousness, which he rains upon you; not as merit, but as mercy.

Come then, and seek the Lord at this very hour! If thou wouldst find him, he is in Christ. Believe, and thou hast found him, and righteousness in him. Rom. iii. 22.

Quickeners.

While Christ calls, it is not too late to come. Dost thou object,—"Is there not a set day, which, if sinners neglect, the door is shut!" I answer,—There is truth in this; but yet there is no day but a sinner ought to come in it. Though thou mayest think the day of Christ's acceptance to be over, yet is not the day of thy submission over. Thy time to be subject to the divine precept is not over while thou livest. Thou art still under the command, and bound to yield obedience to God whatever he biddest thee do. . . . So long as God calls thee, the day is not over. This should encourage thee to come at once, driven by duty, and drawn by grace.—*Ralph Robinson.*

Sir Thomas More, whilst he was a prisoner in the Tower, would not so much as suffer himself to be

trimmed, saying that there was a controversy betwixt the king and him for his head, and till that was at a happy end, he would be at no cost about it. Let us but scum off the froth of his wit, and we may make a solemn use of it; for certainly all the cost we bestow upon ourselves, to make our lives pleasurable and joyous to us, is but mere folly, till it be decided what will become of the suit betwixt God and us, what will be the issue of the controversy that God hath against us, and that not for our heads, but for our souls, whether for heaven or hell. Were it not, then, the wisest course to begin with making our peace; and then we may the sooner lead a happy life? It is said, "He who gets out of debt grows rich." Most sure it is that the pardoned soul cannot be poor; for as soon as peace is concluded, a free trade is opened between God and the soul. If once pardoned, we may then sail to any port that lies in God's dominions, and be welcome. All the promises stand open with their treasures, and say, "Here, poor soul, take in full lading of all precious things, even as much as thy faith can bear and carry away!" —*John Spencer.*

A little maiden stood trembling, weeping, timidly knocking at the door of a minister's library. "Come in," said a cheerful voice. The door handle slowly turned, and there she stood, sobbing with emotion. "What is the matter, my dear child?" said the sympathising pastor. "*Oh, sir,*" was the reply, "*I have lived seven years without Jesus!*" She had just

been celebrating her seventh birthday.—*The British Messenger.*

Moments seize;
Heaven's on their wing: a moment we may wish,
When worlds want wealth to buy.—*Young.*

Thomas Fuller says, "God invites many with his golden sceptre whom he never bruises with his rod of iron." If the invitations of his grace were more freely accepted, we should often escape the chastisements of his hand. Oh, that men did but know that a time of health, and happiness, and prosperity is as fit a season as can be for seeking the Lord! Indeed, any hour is a good time in which to seek the Lord, so long as it is present with us. He who would be wise will find no better day in the calendar for casting away folly than that which is now with him. But let no man trifle with time, for in an instant the die may be cast, and then it is written concerning the ungodly, "I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh:" Prov. i. 26.

CV.

"I WILL BE THY KING."—*Hosea* xiii. 10.

THIS was God's declaration to Israel, meeting a great want, and saving the people from a great burden.

They were to be spared the expense and danger arising from a human monarch, and to find government and headship in God himself.

This did not content their unspiritual nature, and they desired a king, like the nations around them. By this desire they angered the Lord, and missed a great privilege.

To us the Lord presents the same privilege in a high spiritual sense, and if we are wise we shall accept it.

I. THE CRAVING OF NATURE. "Give me a king."

We do not go into the political question of the right or wrong of monarchy in the abstract: that would be too vexed a discussion, and unsuitable for our present engagement. We are quite content with the form of government of our own land.

But we speak morally and spiritually of individual need.

Man was happy in the garden while God was his

King; but when he became a rebel against the King of kings, he was forced to accept another lord.

"Give me a king" is—

1. The cry of weakness. Man needs some one to look up to.
2. The sigh of distress. In straits he sighs for the wise and the strong to counsel and succor him.
3. The prayer of thoughtfulness.
   Anarchy of soul is terrible; each passion fights for mastery.
   A kingless, aimless life is misery. Idleness is hard work: the purposeless are unhappy.
   King Self is a poor, mean, despicable despot, foolish and feeble.
   The World is a cruel and ungrateful master.
4. The desire of experience.
   Folly proved makes us desire a Lawgiver.
   Danger felt makes us long for a Protector.
   Responsibility weighing upon us makes us sigh for a Superior, who will undertake to choose our way, and direct us in it.

II. THE ROYAL ANSWER OF GRACE. "I will be thy King."

1. Eminently condescending. Our God comes to rule over—
   A ruined, bankrupt, desolated realm.
   Torn to pieces by contending pretenders.
   Surrounded by mighty and relentless enemies.
   Full of unruly members.

Nothing but infinite love could prompt him to assume such a throne, or to wear a crown which cost him so dear. "Behold your King!"

2. Abundantly satisfactory; for—

He has power to subdue every inward rebel.

He has a character worthy of dominion. It is a great honor to submit to such a Prince.

He has more than the wisdom of Solomon to arrange every matter.

He has goodness to bless, and he is as ready as he is able to make his reign a period of happiness, peace, and prosperity.

He has love with which to command affectionate obedience.

3. Infinitely consoling—

To be protected by his omnipotence.

To be ruled by absolute perfection.

To be governed by a King who can neither be defeated, nor die, nor abdicate, nor change.

To find in God far more of greatness and goodness than could be dreamed of as existing in the best of earthly sovereigns.

4. Gloriously inspiring—

To live and die for such a Leader.

To claim possession of human hearts for such a Benefactor.

To have such an Example for obedient imitation.

To be for ever linked with a Potentate so majestic.

III. The delight of loyalty. Our answer to the promise of the text is this—"Thou art my King, O God:" Ps. xliv. 4.

If we unreservedly accept our King—

1. We look to see and share his glory ere long. Isa. xxxiii. 17.
2. We expect present deliverances. Ps. xliv. 4.
3. We repose in delicious confidence in the wisdom, goodness, and immutability of all his arrangements.
4. We seek to extend his dominions. Matt. vi. 10.
5. We glory in his name with unspeakable delight. His history is our meditation, his promise is our sustentation, his honors are our glory, and his person is our adoration. His throne is our haven and our heaven. He, himself, is all our salvation, and all our desire. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

Pleas for Homage.

Is Jesus in very deed and truth my King? Where is the proof of it? Am I living in his kingdom of "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" now? (Rom. xiv. 17.) Am I speaking the language of that kingdom? Am I following "the customs of the people" (Jer. x. 3) which are not his people? or, do I "diligently learn the ways of his people?" (Jer. xii. 16.) Am I practically living under the rule of his laws? Have I done heart-homage to him? Am I bravely and honestly uphold

ing his cause, because it is his, not merely because those around me do so? Is my allegiance making any practical difference to my life to-day.—*Miss Havergal.*

God is the ultimate foundation of all human society; without him you can neither cement nor govern society. The mad attempt, if you remember, was made in France. The governing council decreed that there was no God. What was the result? Anarchy, confusion, license, bloodshed, terror. Robespierre, one of the leading spirits of the Revolution, had to declare to his comrades in conclave assembled, "If there be no God, we must make one—we cannot govern France without him.—*J. Cynddylan Jones.*

What, then, shall we render for this inestimable favor, in taking us to be his subjects? Oh, let us offer him not only the tenths of our labors, but the first fruits of our affections: let us open not only the doors of our lips, but the gates of our hearts, that the King of glory may come in. And when thou vouchsafest, O my Lord, to come with thy high majesty under my low roof; and to work a miracle, by having that greatness, which the world containeth not, contained in a little corner of my breast; vouchsafe also to send thy grace for the harbinger of thy glory!

Possess me wholly, O my Sovereign! Reign in my body, by obedience to thy laws; and in my soul, by confidence in thy promises: frame my tongue to praise thee, my knees to reverence thee, my strength

to serve thee, my desires to covet thee, and my heart to embrace thee.—*Sir R. Baker, on the "Lord's Prayer."*

The Lord in our text assumes the throne, not so much by the election of his subjects as by his election of them; and the act is not an ascent to a higher dignity than that which he naturally possesses, but a descent of love to a position which is for our gain rather than his own. He comes to us with this sweet willingness to reign over us, and it is our wisdom joyfully to accept the infinite privileges of his endless dominion.

CVI.

"REND YOUR HEART AND NOT YOUR GARMENTS, AND TURN UNTO THE LORD YOUR GOD."—*Joel* ii. 13.

EXPLAIN the oriental custom of rending robes. People were ready enough to use the outward signs of mourning when, as in the present instance, locusts appeared to devour their crops, or when any other judgment threatened them.

They failed in mourning *as to the Lord*, and in rendering spiritual homage to his chastising rod. Hence the language of the text.

Let us revolve in our minds,—

I. THE GENERAL DOCTRINE THAT TRUE RELIGION IS MORE INWARD THAN OUTWARD.

The expression "Rend your heart, and not your garments," casts somewhat of a slur upon the merely outward.

1. This respects forms and ceremonies of men's devising. These are numerous and vain. "Not your garments" may in their case be treated in the most emphatic manner. Will worship is sin.

2. It bears also upon ordinances of God's own ordaining if practiced without grace, and relied upon as of themselves effectual.

Among good things which may become unprofitable we may mention—

The regular frequenting of a place of worship.
The practice of family prayer in one's own home.
The reading of Holy Scripture.
The holding of an orthodox creed.
The practice of private prayer.
The attendance upon sacraments.

All these good things should have their place in our lives: but they do not prove saintship: since a sinner may practice them all, after a sort. The absence of a true heart will make them all vain.

II. THE FURTHER DOCTRINE THAT MAN IS MORE INCLINED TO THE OUTWARD OBSERVANCE THAN TO INWARD MATTERS.

Hence he needs no exhortation to rend his garments, though that act might in certain cases be a fit and proper expression of deep repentance, and holy horror for sin.

Man is thus partial to externals—

1. Because he is not spiritual, but carnal by nature.
2. Because the inward is more difficult than the outward, and requires thought, diligence, care, humiliation, &c.
3. Because he loves his sin. He will rend his robes, for they are not himself; but to rend off his beloved sins is like tearing out his eyes.
4. Because he cares not to submit to God. Law

and gospel are both distasteful to him; he loves nothing which necessitates the obedience of his heart to God.

Many throng the outer courts of religious observance who shun the holy place of repentance, faith, and consecration.

III. THE PARTICULAR DOCTRINE THAT HEART-RENDING IS BETTER THAN ANY EXTERNAL ACT OF PIETY.

1. Heart-rending should be understood. It is—
   To have the heart broken, contrite, tender, sensitive.
   To have the heart grieving over past evils.
   To have the heart rent away from sin, as by holy violence.
   To have the heart torn with holy horror and indignation in the presence of temptation. The sight of sin should rend the heart, especially when it is seen by the light of the cross.
2. Heart-rending is to be preferred to external observances, for—
   These are not commanded for their own sakes.
   They are good or evil as the heart may be.
   Their observance may co-exist with sin, even with great sin.
   Outward signs may even be Antichrists keeping us from Christ.
   They can never supply the place of Jesus himself.

3. Heart-rending should be practised. "Rend your hearts."

This would need a great tug. Can a man rend himself?

This drives us to look to a higher power.

This is met only by Jesus. Looking to him whom we have pierced, our hearts are rent.

This, when fully done, leaves us at his feet, who alone "healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."

AD REM.

An old Hebrew story tells how a poor creature came one day to the Temple, from a sick bed, on tottering limbs. He was ashamed to come, for he was very poor, and he had no sacrifice to offer; but as he drew near he heard the choir chanting, "Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Other worshippers came, pressed before him, and offered their sacrifices; but he had none. At length he prostrated himself before the priest, who said, "What wilt thou, my son? Hast thou no offering?" And he replied, "No, my father, for last night a poor widow and her children came to me, and I had nothing to offer them but the two pigeons which were ready for the sacrifice." "Bring, then," said the priest, "an ephah of fine flour." "Nay, but, my father," said

the old man, "this day my sickness and poverty have left only enough for my own starving children; I have not even an ephah of flour." "Why, then, art thou come to me?" said the priest. "Because I heard them singing, 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.' Will not God accept my sacrifice if I say, 'Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner?'" Then the priest lifted the old man from the ground, and he said, "Yes, thou art blessed, my son; it is the offering which is better than thousands of rivers of oil."—"*The World of Proverb and Parable*," *by E. Paxton Hood.*

If this hypocrisy, this resting in outward performances, was so odious to God under the law, a religion full of shadows and ceremonies, certainly it will be much more odious under the gospel, a religion of much more simplicity, and exacting so much the more sincerity of heart, even because it disburdens the outward man of the performances of legal rights and observances. And therefore, if we now, under the gospel, shall think to delude God Almighty, as Michael did Saul, with an idol handsomely dressed instead of the true David, we shall one day find that we have not mocked God, but ourselves; and that our portion among hypocrites shall be greater than theirs.—*William Chillingworth.*

As garments to a body, so are ceremonies to religion. Garments on a living body preserve the natural warmth; put them on a dead body and they will never fetch life. Ceremonies help to increase

devotion; but in a dead heart they cannot breed it. These garments of religion upon a holy man are like Christ's garments on his own holy body; but joined with a profane heart, they are like Christ's garments on his crucifying murderers.—*Ralph Brownrig.*

Rending the clothes was a common and very ancient mode of expressing grief, indignation, or concern; and as such is frequently mentioned in the Scriptures. . . . It is said that the upper garment only was rent for a brother, sister, son, daughter, or wife, but all the garments for a father or mother. Maimonides says that the rents were not stitched up again till after thirty days, and were never sewed up well. There is no law which enjoins the Jews to rend their clothes; yet in general they so far think it requisite to comply with this old custom as to make a slight rent for the sake of form.—*Pictorial Bible.*

CVII.

"THUS HE SHEWED ME: AND, BEHOLD, THE LORD STOOD UPON A WALL MADE BY A PLUMBLINE, WITH A PLUMBLINE IN HIS HAND."—*Amos* vii. 7.

THE metaphors of Amos are very forcible, though homely and simple.

He was God-taught; or, as men say, self-taught.

Let his vision come before us, as though we saw it ourselves.

What the Lord had done was according to rule: "he stood upon a wall made by a plumbline." His past dealings are just and true.

The Lord continues to use the same infallible rule: wherever he is, he has a plumbline in his hand.

The plumb of lead falls in a straight line, and therefore the line is the best test as to whether a wall is truly perpendicular. The plumbline shows whether it bows outward, or inclines inward. It never flatters, but by its own certainty of truth it reveals and condemns all deviations from uprightness: such is the judgment of the Most High.

We shall treat the plumbline as the emblem of truth and light.

I. A PLUMBLINE IS USED IN BUILDING.

In all that we build up, we must act by the sure rule of righteousness.

1. In God's building it is so.
   - He removes the old walls when tested by the plumbline, and found faulty. Truth requires the removal of falsehood.
   - He builds in truth and reality. Sincerity is his essential.
   - He builds in holiness and purity.
   - He builds to perfection according to the rule of right.
2. In our own life-building it should be so.
   - Not haste, but truth should be our object.
   - Not according to the eye of man, but according to fact.
   - We should build by the Word; in God's sight; after Christ's example; by the Spirit, unto holiness. Only thus shall we be using the plumbline.
3. In our building of the church it should be so.
   - Teaching the Scriptures only in all things.
   - Preaching nothing but the gospel.
   - Laying sinners low by the law, and exalting the grace of God.
   - Leading men to holiness and peace by the doctrines of truth.
   - Exercising discipline that the church may be pure.

II. A PLUMBLINE IS USED FOR TESTING.

That which is out of the upright is detected by the plumbline, and so are men tested by the truth.

1. We may use it—
   On the wall of self-righteousness, conceit, boasting, etc.
   On the wall of careless living.
   On the wall of trust in ceremonials.
   On the wall of reliance upon merely hearing the gospel.
   On the wall of every outward profession.
2. God uses it in this life. He tests the hearts of men, and tries their doings. They are often detected in the act of deception. Time also proves them, and trials test them.
3. He will use it at the last.
4. Let us use it on ourselves.

Are we born again? Are we without faith, &c.? Are we without holiness? Or is the work of the Spirit to be seen in us?

III. A PLUMBLINE WILL BE USED FOR DESTROYING.

Strict justice is the rule of God's dealing on the judgment-seat.

The same rule will apply to all.

1. Even the saved will be saved justly through our Lord Jesus, and in their case every sin will be destroyed, and every trace of evil will be removed before they enter heaven.
2. No one will be condemned who does not deserve it. There will be a trial, with witnesses, and pleadings, and an infallible Judge. The righteous are saved by sover-

eignty, but the wicked are condemned by righteousness alone.

3. Not a pain will be inflicted unjustly.
   Differences will be made in the cases of the condemned.
   There will be the strictest justice in each award.
   Every circumstance will be taken into account.
   Knowledge or ignorance will increase or abate the number of stripes. Luke xii. 47, 48.
4. Rejectors of Christ will find their doom intolerable, because they, themselves, will be unable to deny its justice. Luke xix. 27. The lost know their misery to be deserved.
5. Since every sentence will be infallible, there will be no revision. So impartial and just will be each verdict that it shall stand for ever. Matt. xxv. 46.

Are we able to endure the test of the plumbline of perfect truth?

Suppose it to be used of God at this moment.

Will it not be wisest to look to Jesus, that we may have him for a foundation, and be built up in him?

Sayings and Sentences.

The question, "What is truth?" was proposed at a Deaf and Dumb Institution, when one of the boys drew *a straight line.* "And what is falsehood?" The answer was *a crooked line.*—*G. S. Bowes.*

That will be a wretched day for the church of God when she begins to think any aberration from the truth of little consequence.—*J. . . Evans.*

Whitefield often affirmed that he would rather have a church with ten men in it right with God, than one with five hundred at whom the world would laugh in its sleeve.—*Joseph Cook.*

Livingstone, as a missionary, was anxious to avoid a large church of nominal adherents. "Nothing," he wrote, "will induce me to form an impure church. 'Fifty added to the church' sounds well at home, but if only five of these are genuine, what will it profit in the Great Day?"—*Blaikie.*

> Set thine heart upright, if thou wouldst rejoice,
> And please thyself in thine heart's pleasing choice:
> But then be sure thy plumb and level be
> Rightly applied to that which pleaseth me.
>
> —*Christopher Harvey.*

Sinners on earth are always punished less, and in hell never more, than their iniquities deserve.—*Benjamin Beddome.*

It is said of the Areopagites, in Athens, that their sentence was so upright that none could ever say he was unjustly condemned of them. How much more true is this of the righteous judgment of God, who must needs therefore be justified, and every mouth stopped.—*Trapp.*

When a building is noticed to bulge a little, our builders hasten to shore it up with timbers; and

before long the surveyor bids them take it down. Should we not see great changes in our churches if all the bowing walls were removed? Yet this would be no real loss, but in the Lord's sight an actual gain to the City of God.

When a man is afraid of self-examination, his fear is suspicious. He who does not dare to apply the plumbline to his wall may rest assured that it is out of perpendicular. A sincere man will pray, "Lord, let me know the worst of my case." It is far better to suffer needless distress than to be at ease in Zion, and then perish of the dry-rot of self-deceit.

CVIII.

"THE PRIDE OF THINE HEART HATH DECEIVED THEE."
Obadiah i. 3.

THIS is true of all proud persons, for pride is self-deceit.

There may be proud persons in this congregation.

Those who are sure that they have no pride are probably the proudest of all. Those who are proud of their humility are proud indeed.

The confidence that we are not deceived may only prove the completeness of the deception under which we labor.

In considering the case of the Edomites, and the pride of their hearts, let us look to ourselves that we may profit withal.

I. THEY WERE DECEIVED.

The prophet mentions certain matters in which they were deceived.

1. As to the estimate formed of them by others. They thought themselves to be had in honor, but the prophet says,—"Thou art greatly despised." See verse 2.

You might not be pleased if you knew how little others think of you; but if you think little of others you need not wonder if you

are yourself greatly despised, for "with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again:" Matt. vii. 2.

2. As to their personal security. They felt safe, but were near their doom. "Who shall bring me down?" "I will bring thee down, saith the Lord" (verses 3 and 4). Dwelling in their rock-city of Petra was no real security to them: neither may any one of us think himself proof against misfortune, sickness, or sudden death.
3. As to their personal wisdom. They talked of "The wise man out of Edom" (verse 8); but the Lord said, "There is none understanding in him" (verse 7).

Those who know better than the word of God know nothing.

4. As to the value of their confidences. Edom relied on alliances, but these utterly failed. "The men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee" (verse 7). Rich relatives, influential friends, tried allies—all will fail those who trust in them.

II. THEIR OWN PRIDE DECEIVED THEM.

1. In each of the points mentioned above, pride lay at the bottom of their error.
2. In every way pride lays a man open to being deceived.

His judgment is perverted by it: he cannot hold the scales.

His standard is rendered inaccurate: his weights are false.

His desires invite flattery, and his folly accepts it.

3. In every case a proud man is a deceived man: he is not what he thinks himself to be; and he is blind to that part of his character which should cause him to be humble.
4. In spiritual cases it is emphatically so.

The self-righteous, self-sufficient, perfectionists, etc., are all deceived by the pride of their hearts.

III. THIS PRIDE LED THEM INTO EVIL WAYS.

1. They were full of defiance. "Who shall bring me down to the ground?" This self-asserting spirit provokes hostility, and leads to wars and fightings, and all manner of emulations and contentions.
2. They were destitute of compassion. "Thou stoodest on the other side." See verses 9–12. Those of kindred race were being slain, and they had no pity. Pride is stony-hearted.
3. They even shared in oppression. See verses 13 and 14. This is not unusual among purse-proud religionists. They are not slow to profit by the nurseries of God's poor people.
4. They showed contempt of holy things. "Ye have drunk upon my holy mountain" (verse 16). God will not have his church

made into a tavern, or a play-house: yet something like this may be done even now by proud hypocrites and formalists.

IV. THESE EVIL WAYS SECURED THEIR RUIN.

1. Their defiance brought enemies upon them.
2. Their unkindness was returned into their own bosom. Verse 15 shows the *lex talionis* in action.
3. Their contempt of God made him say, "there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau" (verse 18).

How different the lot of despised Zion? See verses 17 and 21.

Let us seek him who in Zion is above all others "the Saviour."

Hating all pride, let us humbly rest in him.

Then we shall not be deceived, for Jesus is "the Truth."

WARNINGS.

There is something intensely amusing, according to our notions, in the name which the Eskimo bestow upon themselves. It appears they call themselves the "Innuit,"—that is, "the people" *par excellence.*

If a man is a perfectionist, and thinks he is sin less, it is a proof not that he is better, but only that he is blinder, than his neighbors.—*Richard Glover.*

When a proud man thinks best of himself, then God and man think worst of him; all his glory is but like a vapor, which climbeth as though it would

go up to heaven, but when it comes to a little height, it falls down again, and never ascends more. So Adam thought that the fair apple should make him like his Maker, but God resisted his pride, and that apple made him like the serpent that tempted him with it. Absalom thought that rebellion would make him a king, but God resisted his pride, and his rebellion hanged him on a tree.—*Henry Smith.*

> Stranger, henceforth be warned; and know that pride,
> Howe'er disguised in its own majesty,
> Is littleness; that he who feels contempt
> For any living thing, hath faculties
> Which he has never used; that thought with him
> Is in its infancy. —*Wordsworth.*

The Venetian ambassador wrote of Cardinal Wolsey:—"I do perceive that every year he groweth more and more in power." When I first came to England, he used to say, "*His Majesty* will do so and so;" subsequently, he said, "*We* shall do so and so;" but now he says, "*I* shall do so and so." But history records how Wolsey's pride went before destruction, and his haughty spirit before a fall.

Napoleon Buonaparte, intoxicated with success, and at the height of his power, said, "I make circumstances." Let Moscow, Elba, Waterloo, and St. Helena, that rocky isle where he was caged until he fretted his life away, testify to his utter helplessness in his humiliating downfall.—*J. B. Gough.*

As God hath two dwelling-places, heaven and a contrite heart, so hath the devil—hell and a proud heart.—*T. Watson.*

CIX.

"AND JONAH BEGAN TO ENTER INTO THE CITY A DAY'S JOURNEY, AND HE CRIED, AND SAID, YET FORTY DAYS, AND NINEVEH SHALL BE OVERTHROWN."—*Jonah* iii. 4.

"THE MEN OF NINEVEH SHALL RISE IN JUDGMENT WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SHALL CONDEMN IT: BECAUSE THEY REPENTED AT THE PREACHING OF JONAS; AND, BEHOLD, A GREATER THAN JONAS IS HERE."—*Matthew* xii. 41.

OUR Lord never lost patience with an audience, and never brought railing accusation against any man: his rebuke was well deserved.

Nineveh under Jonah was indeed a reproof to the Jerusalem of our Lord's day, for the Jews, though favored by his divine ministry, did not repent, but wickedly crucified the Messenger of peace.

Might not our Lord rebuke the unbelievers of our day in the same way? Is not Nineveh a reproach to England?

Let us see.

The men of Nineveh repented, and turned to God, and yet—

I. THEIR CALLS TO REPENTANCE WERE NOT MANY.

Many unbelievers have been warned and entreated times without number, and yet they remain impenitent; but—

Nineveh enjoyed no privileges: it was in heathen darkness.

Nineveh heard but one prophet; and he was none of the greatest, or most affectionate.

Nineveh heard that prophet only once; and that was an open-air sermon, very short, and very monotonous.

Nineveh had heard no word of good tidings; she heard the thunder of the law, but nothing else.

Yet the obedience to the warning was immediate, universal, practical, and acceptable, so that the city was spared.

II. THE MESSAGE OF THE PROPHET WAS NOT ENCOURAGING.

1. He proclaimed no promise of pardon.
2. He did not even mention repentance; and consequently he held out no hope to the penitent.
3. He foretold a crushing and final doom: "Nineveh shall be overthrown." His message began and ended with threatening.
4. He mentioned a speedy day: "yet forty days."

Yet out of this dreadful message the people made a gospel, and so acted as on it to find deliverance; while to many of us the rich, free, sure promise of the Lord has been of no force through our unbelief.

Those who heard the teaching of Jesus were, like ourselves, highly favored, for "never man spake like

this Man;" and, like us they were grievously guilty in that they repented not.

III. THE PROPHET HIMSELF WAS NO HELPER TO THEIR HOPE.

Jonah was no loving, tender pastor, anxious to gather the lost sheep.

1. He disliked the ministry in which he was engaged, and no doubt discharged it in a hard, harsh manner.

2. He uttered no word of sympathetic love, for he had none in his heart. He was of the school of Elijah, and knew not the love which burned in the heart of Jesus.

3. He offered no prayer of loving pity.

4. He was even displeased that the city was spared.

Yet these people obeyed his voice, and obtained mercy through hearkening to his warnings. Does not this rebuke many who have been favored with tender and loving admonitions? Certainly it rebuked those who lived in our Lord's day, for no two persons could afford a more singular contrast than Jonah and our Lord.

Indeed, a "greater." better, tenderer than Jonah was there.

IV. THE HOPE TO WHICH THE NINEVITES COULD REACH WAS SLENDER. It was no more than,—"Who can tell?"

1. They had no revelation of the character of the God of Israel.

2. They knew nothing of an atoning sacrifice.
3. They had received no invitation to seek the Lord, not even a command to repent.
4. Their argument was mainly negative.
   Nothing was said against their repenting.
   They could not be the worse for repenting.
5. The positive argument was slender.
   The mission of the prophet was a warning: even a warning implies a degree of mercy: they ventured upon that bare hope, saying, "*Who can tell!*"

Have we not all at least this much of hope?
Have we not far more in the gospel?
Will we not venture upon it?

Monitions.

I saw a cannon shot off. The men at whom it was leveled fell flat on the ground, and so escaped the bullet. Against such blows, falling is all the fencing, and prostration all the armor of proof. But that which gave them notice to fall down was their perceiving of the fire before the ordnance was discharged. Oh! the mercy of that fire, which, as it were, repenting of the mischief it had done, and the murder it might make, ran a race, and outstripped the bullet, that men (at the sight thereof) might be provided, when they could not resist to prevent it! Thus every murdering-piece is also a warning-piece against itself.

God, in like manner, warns before he wounds

frights before he fights. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Oh, let us fall down before the Lord our Maker! Then shall his anger be pleased to make in us a daily pass-over, and his bullets leveled at us must fly above us.—*Thomas Fuller.*

"I have heard," says Mr. Daniel Wilson, in a sermon of his, "of a certain person whose name I could mention, who was tempted to conclude his day over, and himself lost; that, therefore, it was his best course to put an end to his life, which, if continued, would but serve to increase his sin, and consequently his misery, from which there was no escape; and seeing he must be in hell, the sooner he was there the sooner he should know the worst; which was preferable to his being worn away with the tormenting expectation of what was to come. Under the influence of such suggestions as these, he went to a river, with a design to throw himself in; but as he was about to do it, he seemed to hear a voice saying to him, '*Who can tell?*' as if the words had been audibly delivered. By this, therefore, he was brought to a stand; his thoughts were arrested, and thus began to work on the passage mentioned: '*Who can tell?* (Jonah iii. 9) viz., What God can do when he will proclaim his grace glorious. *Who can tell* but such an one as I may find mercy? or what will be the issue of humble prayer to heaven for it? *Who can tell* what purposes God will serve in my recovery?' By such thoughts as these, being

so far influenced as to resolve to try, it pleased God graciously to enable him, through all his doubts and fears, to throw himself by faith on Jesus Christ, as able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him, humbly desiring and expecting mercy for his sake, to his own soul. In this he was not disappointed, but afterwards became an eminent Christian and minister: and, from his own experience of the riches of grace, was greatly useful to the conversion and comfort of others."—*Religious and Moral Anecdotes.*

CX.

"FOR THE INHABITANT OF MAROTH WAITED CAREFULLY FOR GOOD: BUT EVIL CAME DOWN FROM THE LORD UNTO THE GATE OF JERUSALEM."—*Micah* i. 12.

THE village of the bitter spring (for such is probably the meaning of the name Maroth) experienced a bitter disappointment.

The more eager and patient their careful waiting, the more distasteful the draught of evil which they were compelled to drink.

Their trust in man proved to be vain, for the Assyrian swept over them, and stopped not till he reached the gate of Jerusalem, where Hezekiah's faith in God made the enemy pause and retreat.

Let us consider, as suggested by the text,—

I. SAD DISAPPOINTMENTS—"waited carefully for good: but evil came."

Disappointments come frequently to the sanguine, but they also happen to those who wait, wait carefully, and expect reasonably.

1. Disappointments are often extremely painful at the time.
2. Yet could we know all the truth, we should not lament them.
3. In reference to hopes of several kinds they are

certain. As for instance, when we expect more of the creature than it was ever meant to yield us, when we look for happiness in sin, when we expect fixity in earthly things, etc.

4. In many cases disappointments are highly probable. Conceited hopes, groundless expectations, speculations, etc.

5. In all cases they are possible. "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip."

6. They should be accepted with manly patience.

7. They may prove highly instructive, teaching us—

   Our fallibility of judgment.

   The uncertainty of sublunary things.

   The need of reserve in speaking of the future. James iv. 14.

   The duty of submitting all our projects to the divine will.

8. They may be greatly sanctified.

   Sometimes they have turned the current of a life.

   They are intended to wean us from the world.

   They tend to make us prize more the truthfulness of our God, who fulfils the desire of them that fear him.

   They bring us precious things which can only come of experience.

   They save us from unknown evils which might ruin us.

II. Strange appointments.

The text tells us, "evil came down from the Lord."

1. The expression must not be misunderstood. God is not the author of moral evil. It is the evil of sorrow, affliction, calamity that is here meant.
2. It is nevertheless universally true. No evil can happen without divine permission. "I make peace, and create evil:" Isa. xlv. 7.
3. Some evils are distinctly from the Lord. "This evil is of the Lord: 2 Kings vi. 33.
   For testing men, and making their true character to be known.
   For chastening the good. 1 Chron. xxi. 7.
   For punishing the wicked. Gen. vi. 5—7, xix. 24, 25.
4. Hence such evils are to be endured by the godly with humble submission to their heavenly Father's will.
5. Hence our comfort under them: since all evils are under divine control, their power to injure is gone.
6. Hence the antidote for our disappointments lies in the fact that they are God's appointments.

III. Expectations which will not end in disappointment.

1. Hopes founded on the promises of God. Heb. x. 23.
2. Confidence placed in the Lord Jesus. 1 Pet. ii. 6.

3. Desires presented in believing prayer. Matt. xxi. 22.
4. Harvest hopes in connection with sowing seed for the Lord. Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.
5. Expectations in falling asleep in Jesus. 1 Thess. iv. 14.

Is your life embittered by disappointment?

Cast the cross into the bitter water, and it will become sweet.

Gatherings.

During the period when lotteries were unhappily allowed to flourish in this country, a gentleman, looking into the window of a lottery-office in St. Paul's Churchyard, discovered to his joy that his ticket had turned up a £10,000 prize. Intoxicated with this sudden accession of wealth, he walked round the churchyard, to consider calmly how he should dispose of his fortune. On again, in his circuit, passing the lottery-office, he resolved to take another glance at the charming announcement in the window, when, to his dismay, he saw that a new number had been substituted. On enquiry, he found that a wrong number had at first been posted by mistake, and that after all he was not the holder of the prize. His chagrin was now as great as his previous pleasure had been.— *W. Haig Miller's "Life's Pleasure Garden."*

It is wise, when we are disappointed in one thing,

to set over against it a hopeful expectancy of another, like the farmer who said, "If the peas don't pay, let us hope the beans will." Yet it would be idle to patch up one rotten expectation with another of like character for that would only make the rent worse. It is better to turn from the fictions of the sanguine worldling to the facts of the believer in the Word of the Lord. Then, if we find no profit in our trading with earth, we shall fall back upon our heart's treasure in heaven. We *may* lose our gold, but we can never lose our God. The expectation of the righteous is from the Lord, and nothing that comes from him shall ever fail.

I knew one who had made an idol of his daughter, and when she sickened and died, he was exceedingly rebellious, and the result was that he died himself. Expectations which hang upon the frail tenure of a human life may fill our cup with wormwood if we indulge them. Could this father have owned the Lord's hand in the removal of his child, and had he beforehand moderated his expectations concerning her, he might have lived happily with the rest of his family, and have been an example of holy patience. —*C. H. S.*

Who has not muttered "Marah" over some well in the desert which he strained himself to reach, and found to be bitterness? Have you found no salt waters where you thought to find sweetness and joy? Love, beauty, the world's bright throngs,

marriage, home, the things which once wooed you, and promised to slake the thirst of your soul for happiness, are they all Elims, sweet springs and palms? Oh, what fierce murmurings of "Marah" have I heard from hearts wrung with anguish, from souls withered and blasted by a too fond confidence in anything or any being but God! Believe it, no man, with a man's heart in him, gets far on his wilderness way without some bitter soul-searching disappointment; happy he who is brave enough to push on another stage of the journey and rest in Elim, where there are twelve springs, living springs of water, and threescore and ten palm-trees.—*J. B. Brown.*

Disappointments in favorite wishes are trying, and we are not always wise enough to remember that disappointments in time are often the means of preventing disappointments in eternity.—*William Jay.*

CXI.

"EVEN OF LATE MY PEOPLE IS RISEN UP AS AN ENEMY."
Micah ii. 8.

WHEN men are in trouble they are apt to blame God.

But the blame lies with themselves. "Are these his doings?" (verse 7.) Does the good Lord arbitrarily cause sorrows? No, they are the fruit of sin, the result of backsliding.

The Lord here answers Israel's complaint *of him* by a deeply truthful complaint *of them*.

They should not have wondered that they suffered, for they had become enemies of God, and thus enemies to themselves.

I. LET US LISTEN TO THE GRIEVOUS CHARGE.

There is a deep pathos about this as coming from the God of love.

1. They were his own people. "My people." God has enemies enough without his own beloved ones becoming such. It is horrible ingratitude and treachery for the chosen to rebel.
2. They had risen up "as an enemy." Faithless friends wound keenly, and are often more

bitter than other antagonists. For favored ones to rise up as foes is cruel indeed.

3. They had lately done this: "even of late,"—"yesterday," in the margin. The sin is fresh, the wound is bleeding, the offence is rank. A fit of wilfulness was on them.
4. They had done this wantonly. (See latter part of verse.) They picked a quarrel with One who is "averse from war." God would have our love, yet we turn against him without cause.

How far may this indictment lie against us?

II. LET US HEAR THE MORE GRIEVOUS EVIDENCE BY WHICH THE CHARGE IS SUBSTANTIATED.

Taking the words "my people" as referring to all professing Christians, many of them "rise up as an enemy" from the fact of —

1. Their separation from their Lord. "He that is not with me is against me:" Matt. xii. 30. They walk not in communion with him, neither are they diligent in his service, nor careful in obedience, nor consecrated to his cause.
2. Their worldliness. By this the Lord's jealousy is moved, for the world is set up as his rival in the heart. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God:" James iv. 4.
3. Their unbelief, which stabs at his honor, his veracity, his immutability. 1 John i. 10.

A man cannot treat another more maliciously than by calling him a liar.

4. Their heresies, fighting against his revealed truth. It is wretched work when the church and its ministers oppose the gospel. It is to be feared that this is by no means uncommon in these degenerate days.
5. Their unholiness. Unholy professors are, *par excellence*, "*the* enemies of the cross of Christ:" Phil. iii. 18.
6. Their lukewarmness: by which they sicken their Saviour (Rev. iii. 16), grieve his Spirit (Eph. iv. 30), encourage sinners in sin (Ezek. xvi. 54), and discourage seekers.

By these, and other miserable courses of action, those who should be the friends of God are often found to be "risen up as an enemy."

III. LET US HEARKEN TO MOST GRIEVOUS WARNINGS.

No good can possibly come of opposition to the Lord; but the most painful evils will inevitably ensue.

1. In the case of true Christians, there will come to them heavy chastisements and humiliations. If we walk contrary to the Lord, he will walk contrary to us. Lev. xxvi. 23, 24.
2. With these will come the keenest regrets, and agonies of heart. It may be pleasant to go down By-path Meadow, but to return to the King's highway will cost many a groan and tear.

3. In the case of mere professors, there will soon come abandonment of profession, immorality, seven-fold wickedness, &c.
4. To such may also come special punishments, which will make them a terror to the universe of God.

Be anxious to be truly reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus.

Abide in peace with God by yielding to his Spirit.

Increasingly love and honor him, that no root of bitterness may ever spring up between him and you.

Home-thrusts.

It is not, perhaps, that we are determinately his enemies, but his love is so great that he feels very keenly the slightest swerving of our hearts from him. So much so that he that is not with him is against him, he that turns aside from his friendship is felt to be "an enemy."—*From "Wounded in the House of his Friends," by F. M.*

Sin will cause repenting work, even for the children of God. The sins of the wicked pierce Christ's side, but the sins of the godly plunge the spear into his heart.

Carlyle, speaking of the changes made by time, says, "How tragic to me is the sight of old friends; a thing I always really shrink from!" Sin has made still more painful changes in some once numbered amongst the friends of God.

Pharnaces, the son of Mithridates, the king of Pontus, sending a crown to Cæsar at the time he was in rebellion against him, he refused the present, saying, "Let him first lay down his rebellion, and then I will receive his crown." There are many who set a crown of glory upon the head of Christ by a good profession, and yet plant a crown of thorns upon his head by an evil conversation.—*Secker.*

After poor Sabat, an Arabian, who had professed faith in Christ by the means of the labors of the Rev. H. Martyn, had apostatized from Christianity, and written in favor of Mohammedanism, he was met at Malacca by the late Rev. Dr. Milne, who proposed to him some very pointed questions, in reply to which, he said, "I am unhappy! I have a mountain of burning sand on my head. When I go about, I know not what I am doing!" It is indeed an evil thing and bitter to forsake the Lord our God.—*Bate's Cyclopædia.*

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude;
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude.

Freeze, freeze thou bitter sky,
Thou dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though more the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not.—*Shakespeare.*

CXII.

"O MY PEOPLE, WHAT HAVE I DONE UNTO THEE? AND WHEREIN HAVE I WEARIED THEE? TESTIFY AGAINST ME." *Micah* vi. 3.

THIS is a portion of Jehovah's pleading with his people.

He has called upon the mountains and the strong foundations of the earth to hear the suit between him and Israel.

Far be it from us to trifle when God has a controversy with us, for to him it is a matter of deep solemnity. In condescending grace he makes much of the affection of his people, and he will not lose it without effort.

We have before us,—

I. A PITEOUS EXCLAMATION. "O my people!"

Is it not remarkable that such language should be used by the Eternal God?

1. It is the voice of solemn earnestness.
2. It is the cry of sorrow. The interjection is wet with tears.
3. It is the appeal of love. Love injured, but living, pleading, striving, entreating.
4. It is the language of desire. Divine love yearns for the reconciliation of the rebel: it pines to have his loyal affection.

The Lord calls a revolted nation "my people" still. Grace is stronger than sin. Eternal love is not founded upon our merits.

II. A PAINFUL FACT. "Wearied thee."

Israel acted as if they were tired of their God.

1. They were weary of his name. Baal and Ashtaroth had become the fashion, and the living God was despised.
2. They were weary of his worship. The sacrifice, the priest, the holy place, prayer, praise &c.; all these were despised.
3. They were weary of obedience to his laws, though they were right, and just, and meant for their good.
4. They were weary of his restraints: they desired liberty to ruin themselves by transgression.

The parallel between ourselves and Israel lies upon the surface.

In the following points, and many more, certain professors prove their weariness of God,—

They give up nearness of communion.
They abandon preciseness of walking.
They fail in fulness of consecration.
They cool down from intensity of zeal.
They lose the full assurance of faith, and other joys.
And all this because they are in reality weary of their God.

This is a sorrow of sorrows to the great heart of love.

III. A PATIENT ENQUIRY. "What have I done unto thee?" etc.

Amazing love! God himself puts himself upon trial.

1. What single act of God could induce us to forsake his way? "What have I done unto thee?"
2. What continuous way of the Lord could have caused us weariness? "Wherein have I wearied thee?"
3. What testimony of any kind can we bear against God? "Testify against me."

No answer is possible except the most unreserved confession that the Lord has done us no ill.

The Lord is goodness itself, and unmingled kindness.

He has not wearied us with demands of offerings.

He has not burdened us with austerities.

He has not tired us with monotonies.

He has not denied us rest, but has even commanded it.

If wearied with our God, it is—

Because of our foolish waywardness.

Because of our fickle fancy.

Because of our feeble love to himself and holiness.

Or because we have misunderstood his commands.

By all that God has already done for us, let us cling to him.

By the superlative excellence of Jesus, let us be bound to him.

By the sacred power of the Holy Ghost, may we be kept loving to the end.

Quotations.

Now there is one thing to which we need to call the attention of backsliders; and that is,—that the Lord never forsook them; but that they forsook him! The Lord never left them; but they left him! And this, too, without a cause! He says: "What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?" Is not God the same to-day as when you came to him first? Has God changed? Men are apt to think that God has changed; but the change is with them. Backslider, I would ask you, "What iniquity is there in God, that you have left him, and gone far from him?"

Love does not like to be forgotten. You mothers would break your hearts if your children left you, and never wrote you a word, or sent any memento of their affection for you: and God pleads over backsliders as a parent over loved ones who have gone astray and he tries to woo them back. He asks, "What have I done that you should have forsaken me?" The most tender and loving words to be found in the whole of the Bible are from Jehovah to those who have left him without a cause.—*D. L. Moody.*

Let those tempted to depart from the Lord remember the answer of Christian to Apollyon, when the

latter sought to persuade him to turn back, and forsake his Lord: "O thou destroying Apollyon, to speak truth, I like his service, his wages, his servants, his government, his company, and country, better than thine; and, therefore, leave off to persuade me further: I am his servant, and I will follow him."

Polycarp, being required by an infidel judge to blaspheme Christ, made him this witty and devout answer: "Eighty-six years have I lived, neither did he once harm me in any one thing; why, then, should I blaspheme my God, which hath neither hindered me nor injured me?" We cannot charge our God with any wrong, our gracious Lord with any hardness, injury, or unkindness towards us; but must always, with Polycarp, acknowledge his exceeding bounty and unspeakable goodness.—*Richard Meredeth.*

"*O my people, what have I done unto thee?*" or, rather, what have I not done to do thee good? "O generation, see ye the word of the Lord," and not hear it only; was ever anything more evidencing and evincing than what I now allege? "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel, a land of darkness?" Jer. ii. 31. May I not well say unto you, as Themistocles did to his ungrateful countrymen, "What? are ye weary of receiving so many benefits from one man?" But say, What hurt have I ever done you? and wherein have I wearied you, or been troublesome to you? unless it be by daily loading you with loving-kindness (Ps. lxviii. 19), and bearing with your

provocations? Forgive me that injury (2 Cor. xii. 13).—*Trapp.*

"*O my people,*" &c. If subjects quit their allegiance to their prince, they will pretend, as the ten tribes did when they revolted from Rehoboam, that his yoke is too heavy for them; but can you pretend any such thing? *What have I done to you* that is unjust or unkind? *Wherein have I wearied you* with the impositions of service, or the exactions of tribute? *Have I made you to serve with an offering?* Isa. xliii. 23.—*Matthew Henry.*

CXIII.

"THE LORD IS GOOD, A STRONG HOLD IN THE DAY OF TROUBLE; AND HE KNOWETH THEM THAT TRUST IN HIM."—*Nahum* i. 7.

HERE we come upon an island in Nahum's stormy lake. All is calm in this verse, though the whole context is tossed with tempest.

The text is full of God, and brims over with his praise.

I. GOD HIMSELF. "Jehovah is good."

1. Good; in himself essentially and independently.
2. Good; eternally and unchangeably.
3. Good in each person: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
4. Good in all his acts of grace.
5. Good in all former acts of providence.
6. Good in his present act, be it what it may.
7. Good for a stronghold: to be trusted in trouble.
8. Good to his own people, who find their goodness in him.

Let us praise him as good in the most emphatic and unlimited sense. Whoever else may or may not be good, we know that the Lord is good. Yea, "there is none good but one, that is, God:" Matt. xix. 17.

II. GOD TO US. "A strong hold in the day of trouble."

1. Under special circumstances our resort.
   The day of trouble, when trial is special and vehement.
   The *day* of trouble: temporary, but yet long enough to last through our life unless the Lord prevent.
   The day of *trouble:* when within, without, around, there seem to be only care, and fear, and want, and grief.
2. Securing our safety at all times: for a stronghold is always strong, even when there is no immediate war.
3. Maintaining our peace. Within the walls of a castle men walk at ease, for they are shut in from enemies.
4. Defying our foes, who dare not attack such a fortress.
5. Abiding for ever the same: always a sure refuge for the needy.

Let us run to him, as the poor people of the open country fly to the walled towns in the time of war.

III. GOD WITH US. "He knoweth them that trust in him."

The term "he knoweth" them includes—

1. His intimate acquaintance with their persons, conditions, &c.
2. His tender care to supply all their necessities.

3. His divine approval of them. To others he says, "I know you not:" Luke xiii. 25.
4. His loving communion with them, which is the best proof that they are known to him, and are his beloved friends.
5. His open acknowledgment: he owns them now, and will confess them before assembled worlds: Rev. iii. 5.

Let us believe in the goodness of the Lord even when we cannot discern it with the eye of sense.

Let us fly to his protection when storms of trouble fall.

Let us confide in his loving care when hunted by our enemies.

Let us take care that we rely upon him, in Christ Jesus, for salvation.

Testimonies.

The only place of safety in this world is the one in which we are sure to meet God, and to be "under the shadow of his wing." The Bible sets forth, in grand metaphor, this idea, by speaking of a "fortress into which the righteous runneth, and is safe;" and of "a strong tower," and of "the shadow of a great rock." When we were in the Yosemite Valley, lately, our driver told us of a series of terrific earthquakes, which visited the valley several years ago. The few inhabitants who dwelt there were thrown out of their beds in the night. Frail cottages were

overturned. Loose rocks were hurled down from the precipices into the valley. These shocks were repeated for several days until the people were panic-stricken and ready to despair. "What did you do?" we inquired. The driver (pointing to the mighty and immovable rock, El Capitan, which rises for three thousand feet on the south side of the valley, and has a base of three solid miles) replied: "We determined to go and camp under old *Capitan;* for if that ever moved we knew the world would be coming to an end."—*Dr. Cuyler.*

Tamar may disguise herself, and walk in an unaccustomed path, so that Judah may not know her; Isaac, through the dimness of his sight, may bless Jacob, and pass over Esau; want of time may make Joseph forget, or be forgotten of, his brethren; Solomon may doubt to whom of right the child belongeth; and Christ may come to his own, and not be received: but the Lord knoweth them that are his, and his eye is always over them. Time, place, speech, or apparel cannot obscure or darken his eye or ear. He can discern Daniel in the den; and Job, though never so much changed, on the dung-hill. Let Jonah be lodged in the whale's belly, Peter be put into a close prison, or Lazarus be wrapped in rags, or Abel rolled in blood, yet can he call them by name, and send his angels to comfort them. Ignorance and forgetfulness may cause love and knowledge to be estranged in the creature, but the Lord is not incident to either. for his eye, as his

essence, is everywhere; he knoweth all things.—*Spencer's "Things New and Old."*

A safe stronghold our God is still,
A trusty shield and weapon;
He'll help us clear from all the ill
That hath us now o'ertaken.
The ancient Prince of hell
Hath risen with purpose fell;
Strong mail of craft and power
He weareth in this hour,
On earth is not his fellow,

With force of arms we nothing can,
Full soon were we down-trodden;
But for us fights the proper Man,
Whom God himself hath bidden.
Ask ye, "Who is this same?"
Christ Jesus is his name,
The Lord Zebaoth's Son,
He and no other one
Shall conquer in the battle.—*Martin Luther.*

Many talk of trusting God when indeed they know nothing of real faith. How are we to know who is, and who is not, a believer? This question is hard to answer in times of prosperity, but not in the day of trouble: then the true truster is calm and quiet in his God, and the mere pretender is at his wits' end. Our text seems to hint as much. Everybody can find a bird's nest in winter when the trees are bare, but the green leaves hide them; so are believers discovered by adversity. One thing, however, should never be forgotten: whether *we* know believers or not, God knows them. He does not in-

clude one hypocrite in the number, nor exclude one sincere truster, even though he be of little faith. He knows infallibly and universally. Does he know *me*, even me, as one of those who trust in him? The Lord knoweth them that are his, and they know him as their stronghold. Have I such knowledge?

CXIV

"I WILL STAND UPON MY WATCH, AND SET ME UPON THE TOWER, AND WILL WATCH TO SEE WHAT HE WILL SAY UNTO ME, AND WHAT I SHALL ANSWER WHEN I AM REPROVED.

"AND THE LORD ANSWERED ME, AND SAID, WRITE THE VISION, AND MAKE IT PLAIN UPON TABLES, THAT HE MAY RUN THAT READETH IT.

"FOR THE VISION IS YET FOR AN APPOINTED TIME, BUT AT THE END IT SHALL SPEAK AND NOT LIE: THOUGH IT TARRY, WAIT FOR IT: BECAUSE IT WILL SURELY COME, IT WILL NOT TARRY.

"BEHOLD, HIS SOUL WHICH IS LIFTED UP IS NOT UPRIGHT IN HIM: BUT THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY HIS FAITH."—*Habakkuk* ii. 1—4.

THE promise of God tarried, and the ungodly triumphed.

Here was the old problem of David in another form. "Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously?" (Hab. i. 13) is but a repetition of "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." (Ps. lxxiii. 3.)

This same problem occurs to ourselves, and this text may help us.

Observe with understanding,—

I. THE SENSE IN WHICH THERE IS A DELAY IN THE PROMISE.

It is not every apparent delay which is real. Our

time and God's time are not measured upon the same dial.

1. Each promise will bide in due season for fulfilment: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time."
2. Each promise in the end will prove true: "At the end it shall speak, and not lie."
3. Each promise will repay our waiting: "Though it tarry, wait for it."
4. Each promise will really be punctual to its hour: "It will surely come, it will not tarry."

The word of the Lord is as true to the time as to the thing.

To him its time of ripening is short: only to us is it long.

II. THE ATTITUDE OF A BELIEVER WHILE THE PROMISE DELAYS.

We should watch for the appearing of the Lord in fulfilment of his promise, and should be prepared to receive reproof as well as blessing.

The prophet took up—

1. A determined and thoughtful attitude: "I will stand, and set me."
2. An attentive attitude: "and will watch to see what he will say unto me." He is engrossed in this one pursuit: he only desires to be taught of the Lord.
3. A patient attitude: "I will set me upon the

tower." It is as if he had been set as a sentinel, and would remain at his post.

4. A solitary position if need be. He speaks of himself alone.
5. A humble and submissive frame of mind: "what I shall answer when I am reproved."

In all respects the man of God is ready for his Lord.
The delay is evidently a blessing to him.
The blessing will be the greater when it comes.

III. THE WORK OF THE LORD'S SERVANT WHILE THE PROMISE DELAYS.

1. By faith see the vision. Realize the fulfilment of the divine word in your own soul. "Watch to see what he will say."
2. Declare it as certain: record it in black and white, as a fact not to be questioned. "Write the vision upon tables."
3. Declare it plainly, so that the runner may read it.
4. Declare it practically, so that he that readeth may run in consequence of it.
5. Declare it permanently. Write down the matter for a record to be referred to: engrave it on tablets for perpetuity.

Sham faith prudently declines to mention her expectations.

It is deemed presumptuous, fanatical, and imprudent to be positive that God will keep his promise and still more to *say* so.

The real believer thinks not so, but acts with the Lord's promises as he would deal with engagements made in business by honest men: he treats them as real, and would have others do the like.

IV. THE DIFFERENCE SEEN IN MEN WHEN THE DELAY OF THE PROMISE TESTS THEM.

1. The graceless man is too proud to wait on God as the Lord's servant will do. "His soul is not upright in him."
   He is himself dishonest, and so suspects his God.
   This prevents his finding comfort in the promise.
2. The just man believes the word of a holy God.
   He waits serenely, in full assurance; and
   He lives in the highest sense by his faith.

"My soul, wait thou only upon God:" Ps. lxii. 5.

What can he do who has no faith in his Maker? Heb xi. 6.

FROM OUR TABLETS.

It was a custom among the Romans for the public affairs of every year to be committed to writing by the *pontifex maximus*, or high priest, and published on a table. They were thus exposed to public view, so that the people might have an opportunity of being acquainted with them. It was also usual to hang up laws approved and recorded on tables of

brass in their market-places, and in their temples, that they might be seen and read. (*Tacitus.*) In like manner, the Jewish prophets used to write, and expose their prophecies publicly on tables, either in their own houses, or in the temple, that every one that passed by might go in and read them.—*Burder.*

And though it linger till the night,
And round again till morn,
My heart shall ne'er mistrust thy might,
Nor count itself forlorn.
Do thus, O ye of Israel's seed.
Ye of the Spirit born indeed,
Wait for your God's appearing! *Martin Luther.*

Good old Spurstow says that "some of the promises are like the almond-tree—they blossom hastily in the very earliest spring; but," saith he, "there are others which resemble the mulberry-tree they are very slow in putting forth their leaves." Then what is a man to do, if he has a mulberry-tree promise, which is late in blossoming? Why, he is to wait till it does blossom; since it is not in his power to hasten it. If the vision tarry, exercise the precious grace called patience, and the appointed time shall surely bring you a rich reward.—*C. H. S.*

God's promises are dated, but with a mysterious character; and, for want of skill in God's chronology, we are prone to think God forgets us; when, indeed, we forget ourselves in being so bold as to set God a time of our own, and in being angry that he comes not just then to us.—*Gurnall.*

If we were more humble, we should be more patient. A beggar, who is worn with hunger, will wait at the rich man's gate for many an hour with the hope of getting broken victuals; but my lord, who is in no need, will soon be gone if the door does not open to his knock. We have kept the Lord waiting long enough, and we need not wonder if he tries our faith and patience by apparent delays. In any case, let us settle this in our hearts, that he must and will fulfil his promises. Our text shows us a punctual God, a patient waiter, and a published confidence; but it finishes up with a proud unbeliever. Or, if you will, it is man uttering a brave resolve, and the Lord answering to his faith; reasons presented to patient faith, and rebukes to impatient pride.

CXV.

"BEHOLD, HIS SOUL WHICH IS LIFTED UP IS NOT UPRIGHT IN HIM: BUT THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY HIS FAITH."—*Habakkuk* ii 4.

DELAY of deliverance is a weighing of men. Suspense is very trying, and constitutes a searching test.

This divides men into two classes by bringing out their real character.

The proud and the just stand out in relief; the uplifted and the upright are far as the poles asunder; and the result of trial in the two cases is as different as death from life.

The tarrying of the promise—

I. REVEALS A GREAT FAULT—"his soul which is lifted up."

The man is impatient, and will not endure to wait. This is pride full-blown, for it quarrels with the Lord, and dares to dictate to him.

1. It is very natural to us to be proud. So fell our first father, and we inherit his fault.
2. Prides takes many shapes, and among the rest this vainglorious habit of thinking that we ought to be waited on at once.
3. In all cases pride is unreasonable. Who are

we that God should make himself our servant, and take his time from our watch.

4 In every case pride is displeasing to God, and specially when it interferes with the sovereign liberty of his own grace. Shall he be dictated to in the matter of his own love? "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Rom. ix. 20.

II. Betrays a sad evil—"his soul is not upright in him."

1. He does not know the truth. His mind is out of the perpendicular, his knowledge is incorrect, and his judgment is mistaken. He puts "bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter:" Is. v. 20.
2. He does not seek the light. His heart is not upright: the affections are perverted. He has a bias towards conceited views of self, and does not wish to be set right. Obad. i. 3.
3. His whole religion is warped by his false mood of heart and mind. The very soul of the man is put out of order by his vanity.
4. He will not endure the test of waiting; he will sin in his haste to be delivered; he will rush from God to other confidences; he will show by his life that his real self is not right with God.

III. Discovers a serious opposition.

He grows tired of the gospel, which is the sum of

the promises, and he becomes averse to the exercise of the faith which it requires.

His pride makes him reject salvation by grace, through faith in Jesus.

1. He is too great to consider it
2. He is too wise to believe it.
3. He is too good to need it.
4. He is too advanced in "culture" to endure it.

Most of the objections to revealed truth arise from a mind thrown out of balance by pride of intellect, or pride of purse, or pride of heart.

IV. DIRECTS US TO A PLEASING CONTRAST.

1. The man who is really just is truly humble. The text implies a contrast in this respect between the proud and the just.
2. Being humble, he does not dare to doubt his God, but yields to his word an implicit faith.
3. His faith keeps him alive under trial, and conducts him into the joys and privileges of spiritual life.
4. His life conquers the trial, and developes into life eternal.

The Believer has the blessing promised, and truly lives while he lives.

The Unbeliever misses the blessing, and is dead while he lives.

What folly to refuse faith because of pride, and so to miss eternal life and all its felicities!

Quotations.

"I think it is decidedly unscriptural to fix any time with God for his doing anything. The times and seasons the Father hath put in his own hand. The man Christ Jesus has asked for the heathen, and he *will* get them, but he has waited eighteen hundred years already, and has told us that as Man he knows nothing of the 'when.' Pray on, and believe; you *shall* reap."—*From a letter of Brownlow North to a Christian worker.*

Strange that the mortal, who cannot believe in the healing power of the sparkling Jordan, will often willingly go down to the muddiest creek of Abana and Pharpar!—*Edward Garrett.*

As the first step heavenward is humility, so the first step hellward is pride. Pride counts the gospel foolishness, but the gospel always shows pride to be so. Shall the sinner be proud who is going to hell? Shall the saint be proud who is newly saved from it? God had rather his people fared poorly than live proudly—*Mason.*

Poverty of spirit is the bag into which Christ puts the riches of his grace.—*Rowland Hill.*

We must be emptied of self before we can be filled with grace; we must be stripped of our rags before we can be clothed with righteousness; we must be unclothed that we may be clothed; wounded, that we may be healed; killed, that we may be made alive buried in disgrace, that we may rise in holy

glory. These words, "Sown in corruption, that we may be raised in incorruption; sown in dishonor, that we may be raised in glory; sown in weakness, that we may be raised in power," are as true of the soul as of the body. To borrow an illustration from the surgeon's art: the bone that is set wrong must be broken again, in order that it may be set aright. I press this truth on your attention. It is certain that a soul filled with self has no room for God; and like the inn at Bethlehem, crowded with meaner guests, a heart preoccupied by pride and her godless train, has no chamber within which Christ may be born in us "the hope of glory."—*Guthrie.*

A heart full of pride is but a vessel full of air; this self-opinion must be blown out of us before saving knowledge be poured into us. Humility is the knees of the soul, and to that posture the Lamb will open the book; but pride stands upon tip-toes, as if she would snatch the book, and unclasp it herself. The first lesson of a Christian is humility; and he that hath not learned the first lesson is not fit to take out a new.—*Thomas Adams.*

But for pride, the angels who are in hell should be in heaven (Jude 6); but for pride, Nebuchadnezzar, who is in the forest, should be in his palace (Daniel iv.); but for pride, Pharaoh, who lies with the fishes, should be with his nobles (Exodus xiv.); no sin hath pulled so many down as this, which promised to set them up. Of all the children of pride, the

Pope is the father, which sitteth in the temple of God, and is worshipped as God (2 Thess. ii. 4). . . . But for pride, the Pharisees would have received Christ as gently as his disciples; but for pride, Herod would have worshipped Christ as humbly as the shepherds; but for pride, our men would go like Abraham, and our women like Sarah, as they would be called their children; but for pride, noblemen would come to church as well as the people; but for pride, gentles would abide reproof as well as servants; but for pride, thou wouldst forgive thy brother, and the lawyers should have no work.—*Henry Smith.*

CXVI.

"BEHOLD, HIS SOUL WHICH IS LIFTED UP IS NOT UPRIGHT IN HIM: BUT THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY HIS FAITH."—*Habakkuk* ii. 4.

"FOR THEREIN IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED FROM FAITH TO FAITH: AS IT IS WRITTEN, THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."—*Romans* i. 17.

"BUT THAT NO MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW IN THE SIGHT OF GOD, IT IS EVIDENT: FOR THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."—*Galatians* iii. 11.

"NOW THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH: BUT IF ANY MAN DRAW BACK, MY SOUL SHALL HAVE NO PLEASURE IN HIM."—*Hebrews* x. 38.

WHEN the Spirit of God frequently repeats himself, he thereby appeals for special attention.

A doctrine so often declared must be of the first importance.

A doctrine so often declared should be constantly preached.

A doctrine so often declared should be unhesitatingly received by each one of our hearers.

I. WE WILL TREAT THE FOUR TEXTS AS ONE.

The teaching is clear. "The just shall live by his faith."

1. Life is received by the faith which makes a man just.

A man begins to live by a full acquittal from

condemnation, and from *penal* death, so soon as he believes in Jesus.

A man begins to live as one raised out of *spiritual* death so soon as he has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

No form of works, or profession, or knowledge, or even of natural feelings, can prove him to be an absolved and quickened man; but faith does this.

2. Life is sustained by the faith which keeps a man just.

He who is forgiven and quickened lives ever afterwards as he began to live—namely, by faith. Neither his feelings, nor devotions, nor acquirements ever become his trust: he still looks out of himself to Jesus. He is nothing except so far as he is a believer.

He lives by faith as to all the forms of his life,—

As a child, and as a servant;

As a pilgrim progressing, and as a warrior contending;

As a pensioner enjoying, and as an heir expecting.

He lives by faith in every condition,—

In joy and in sorrow; in wealth and in poverty;

In strength and in weakness; in laboring and in languishing; in life and in death.

He lives best when faith is at its best, even though in other respects he may be sorely

put to it. He lives the life of Christ most blessedly when most intensely he believes in Christ.

Hearty belief in God, his Son, his promises, his grace, is the soul's life, neither can anything take its place. "Believe and live" is a standing precept both for saint and sinner. "Now abideth faith." 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

II. WE WILL TREAT THE FOUR TEXTS SEPARATELY.

If we read with precision, we shall see that Scripture contains no repetitions. The context gives freshness of meaning to each apparent repetition.

1. Our first text (Hab. ii. 4) exhibits faith as enabling a man to live on in peace and humility, while as yet the promise has not come to its maturity. While waiting we live by faith, and not by sight.

   We are thus able to bear up under the temporary triumphs of the wicked. See the first chapter of Habakkuk's prophecy.

   We are thus preserved from proud impatience at delay.

   We are thus filled with delight in confident expectation of good things to come.

2. Our second text (Rom. i. 17) exhibits faith as working salvation from the evil which is in the world through lust. The chapter in which it stands presents an awful view of human nature, and implies that only faith in the gospel can bring us life in the form of—

Mental enlightenment of life as to the true God: Rom. i. 19—23.

Moral purity of life: Rom. i. verse 24, and onward.

Spiritual life and communion with that which is divine and holy.

Naturally men are dead and corrupt. The law reveals our death, see Rom. iii. 10—20; but the gospel imparts spiritual life to those who receive it by faith.

3. Our third text (Gal. iii. 11) exhibits faith as bringing to us that justification which saves us from the sentence of death.

Nothing can be plainer, more positive, more sweeping than this declaration that no man is justified before God except by faith. Both the negative and the positive are plain enough.

4. Our fourth text (Heb. x. 38) exhibits faith as the life of final perseverance.

There is need of faith while waiting for heaven (verses 32—36).

The absence of such faith would cause us to draw back (verse 38).

That drawing back would be a fatal sign.

That drawing back can never occur, for faith saves the soul from all hazards, keeping its face heavenwards even to the end.

What can you do who have no faith?

In what other way can you be accepted with God?

On what ground can you excuse your unbelief in your God?

Will you perish sooner than believe him?

Breviates.

The Jews in the Talmud have the saying, "The whole law was given to Moses at Sinai, in six hundred and thirteen precepts." David, in the fifteenth Psalm, brings them all within the compass of eleven. Isaiah brings them to six (Isaiah xxxiii. 15); Micah to three (Micah vi. 8); Isaiah, again, to two (Isaiah lvi.); Habakkuk to this one, "The just shall live by his faith."—*Lightfoot.*

The soul is the life of the body. Faith is the life of the soul. Christ is the life of faith.—*Flavel.*

Inscribed upon the portal from afar
Conspicuous as the brightness of a star,
Legible only by the light they give
Stand the soul-quickening words—BELIEVE AND LIVE.

To believe God is not a little thing: it is the index of a heart reconciled to God, and the token of true spirituality of mind; it is the essence of true worship, and the root of sincere obedience. He who believes his God in spite of his sins, does him more honor than cherubim and seraphim in their continual adoration. A little thing faith! How is it then that unbelief is so great a crime that it is marked out for reprobation as the one damning evil which shuts men out of heaven? Whatever else you put in the second place, give faith the lead; it is not a vain thing, for it is your life.

CXVII.

"SEEK YE THE LORD, ALL YE MEEK OF THE EARTH, WHICH HAVE WROUGHT HIS JUDGMENT; SEEK RIGHTEOUSNESS, SEEK MEEKNESS: IT MAY BE YE SHALL BE HID IN THE DAY OF THE LORD'S ANGER."—*Zephaniah* ii. 3.

THERE is a "may be" about all temporal things; and in pleading for them we ask with much diffidence.

Yet we may plead confidently when our appeal is made to God in the day of his anger. Then our need is pressing: it is for our life that we are pleading, and the Lord is very gracious in our extremities.

In spiritual things we may draw encouragement from the faintest sign of hope when it proceeds from God: "it may be ye shall be hid."

The seeking for refuge, here commanded, is directed only to the meek and righteous; but it is *our* joy to proclaim a hiding-place for the guilty, and to bid them seek the Lord even on the least encouragement.

The three seekings commanded are:—

"Seek the Lord;" or, repent, and trust in Jehovah.

"Seek righteousness." Directed as it is in the text to those who are already righteous, it bids them persevere in righteousness.

"Seek meekness." Spoken to the meek, it

bids them bow even more humbly before the chastening hand of God.

But our point is this: that we may seek the Lord upon the faintest encouragement. There are strong inducements and large promises; but if we cannot grasp these we may come even with a "may be."

I. IN MANY A RECORDED INSTANCE "MAY BE" HAS PROMPTED AND JUSTIFIED A RIGHT ACTION.

From the cases which we will mention lessons may be learned.

1. A "may be" led Jonathan to attack the garrison of the Philistines. 1 Sam. xiv. 6. "It may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." This should nerve saints for holy enterprises.
2. A "may be" cheered David when Absalom rebelled, and Shimei cursed. 2 Sam. xvi. 12. "It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction." Let us hope in God in our darkest hours.
3. A "may be" induced the lepers to visit the Syrian camp. 2 Kings vii. 4. Their desperate venture should be laid to heart by those who are in like condition. They can but perish in any case; let them seek the Lord, and try whether he does not save.
4. A "may be," diluted with an "if so be," moved the afflicted to humble himself. See Jere-

miah's Lamentations iii. 29. Let no tried soul refuse the like hope.

5. A "may be," in the form of "Who can tell?" brought all Nineveh to repentence. Jonah iii. 9.

If others have acted so vigorously upon such slender encouragement, may not we, when dreading the ruin of our souls, act with like decision and hopefulness? If we fly to Jesus by childlike faith, there is more than a "may be" that the result will be happy.

II. IN THE INSTANCE OF A SINCERE SEEKER THE "MAY BE" IS OF UNUSUAL STRENGTH.

There is every probability of the penitent obtaining salvation if we—

1. Consider the gracious nature of our God. Micah vii. 18.
2. Consider the glorious work of Christ for sinners. 1 Tim. i. 15.
3. Consider the mercy they have already received. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed:" Lam. iii. 22.
4. Consider the number and character of those who have been saved. Rev. v. 9, vii. 9. 1 Cor. vi. 11.
5. Consider the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit. John iii. 8.
6. Consider the glory which is to be the Lord's at the last: surely it will come by saving souls, and saving many of them.

III. BUT IN THE SEEKER'S CASE HE HAS FAR MORE TO GO UPON THAN A MERE "MAY BE."

There are innumerable sure promises in the Word of God, and these are made to—

Repentance. Prov. xxviii. 13. Isa. lv. 7.

Faith. Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 18. Acts xvi. 31.

Prayer. Matt. vii. 7. Acts ii. 21.

Let these promises be studied, and their encouragement accepted by immediate compliance with their requirements.

Consider that God foresaw all events when he made these promises, and accordingly he has not made them in error.

Consider that he cannot withdraw his promise.

Consider that he is the same as when he made the promise, and so in effect makes it again every day.

Consider that it will be a crime to doubt the Lord our God, and an act of reverence to believe him. Venture now upon the bare promise of God, who cannot lie. Titus i. 2.

O sinner, seek the Lord!

He comes to you in Christ Jesus. Look to him at once, and live.

CHEERING WORDS.

Possibly ye may be hid from punishment, probably ye shall escape sorrow: but pardon of sin ye shall be sure of; mitigation also of sorrow, if not preven-

tion of it. Saved ye shall be, or more gently handled, or so inwardly calmed, that ye shall be able to call your souls to rest when others are at their wits' ends. You shall be safe under the cover of God's wings, and in the hollow of his hand; when others, that are without God in the world, shall be as a naked man in a storm, as an unarmed man in the field of battle, or as a ship at sea without an anchor, subject to dash and split against rocks and quicksands.—*Trapp.*

Dr. John Duncan was once heard thus addressing a beggar-woman in Edinburgh:—"Now, you'll promise me that you'll seek: but mind, seeking will not save you, yet it is your duty; and if you seek you'll find, and finding will save you."

Our hope is not hung upon such untwisted thread as "I imagine so;" or, "it is likely;" but the cable, the strong rope of our fastened anchor, is the oath and promise of him who is eternal verity; our salvation is fastened with God's own hand, and Christ's own strength, to the strong stake of God's unchanging nature.—*Rutherford.*

How long a beggar will wait, and how eagerly he will plead, although he has no promise of an alms, but only the bare chance of winning a penny from a passer-by! How laboriously will fishers cast their nets again and again, though nothing has been taken as yet, and their only encouragement is the possibility that fish may come that way! How desperately will men dive into the sea with the expectation of

finding pearls in oyster-shells, encountering fierce monsters of the deep with the uncertain hope of being enriched! And will not men draw near to God when their outlook is so much more bright, their expectation so much more justifiable? As for me, I will lay down my sick soul at Christ's feet, in sure and certain belief that he will heal me, and then I will follow him whithersoever he goeth, in calm assurance that he will lead me to his eternal kingdom and glory.—*C. H. S.*

CXVIII.

"SHE OBEYED NOT THE VOICE; SHE RECEIVED NOT CORRECTION; SHE TRUSTED NOT IN THE LORD; SHE DREW NOT NEAR TO HER GOD."—*Zephaniah* iii. 2.

WHEN the Lord is judging men he does not spare those who are called his people: Moab and Ammon and Nineveh are visited, and Jerusalem is not spared.

There are sins which outsiders cannot commit, such as those of the text. When peculiar privileges only create peculiar sins, they will be followed by peculiar punishments.

The offences mentioned in this verse are to be found in nations, churches, and individuals unto this day: and in a measure among God's own people.

I. IN THE TEXT WE PERCEIVE FOUR MANIFEST SINS.

1. We will make upon them, as a whole, four observations.

Sins of omission are sure to exist where there are sins of commission. Jerusalem is said to be "filthy and polluted," and then these omissions are recited.

Sins of omission rank with the blackest of offences. Consider the context, and see with what fearful crimes omissions are catalogued, as if to mark their vileness.

Sins of omission go in clusters. "She obeyed not." "She received not instruction." "She trusted not." "She drew not near to her God." How many foul birds may dwell in one nest! One sin never goes alone.

Sins of omission are none the less when they are mainly spiritual. Such are those mentioned in the text, and they are cited among crimes of deepest dye.

2. We will note each one of the four separately.

They heard God speak, but they took no heed. This included rebellion, hardness of heart, presumption, and defiance of the Lord; and all this after solemn warnings, great instruction, and tender invitation.

They felt correction, but were not instructed. This involved greater persistence in rebellion, and still more obduracy of heart.

They were unbelieving and distrustful, and relied upon idols, and not upon the Lord. Unbelief is a master-sin.

They had no communion with their God. "Her God" implies existence of covenant-relationship, in name at least; but there was no worship, love, or service.

These four sins abound around us, and among us. Inattention, Obstinacy, Unbelief, and Aversion to God are all common.

They involve men in misery in this life, and in eternal ruin in the world to come. Are they not destroying some of you?

II. IN THE TEXT WE SPY OUT FOUR HIDDEN ENCOURAGEMENTS TO SEEK BETTER THINGS.

Let those who confess their sin look at the text with hope, for it is clear that—

1. God does speak to men. He may speak to us again.
2. God corrects for our good. It is meant for instruction, not for destruction. (See the margin.)
3. God would have us trust him. He would not blame us for not trusting if we were not permitted to trust him.
4. God would have us draw near to him. Else it were not mentioned as our sin that we do not draw near to him.

All this applies to us at this day.

Still the Lord is in the midst of us, reading our inmost souls.

Let us lay our sins to heart, and seek his face through Christ Jesus.

A FEW SMALL FISHES.

Remember, O my soul, the fig-tree was charged, not with bearing noxious fruit, but no fruit.—*Thomas Fuller.*

The last words that Archbishop Usher was heard to say were these—"Lord forgive my sins, especially my sins of omission."

Sins of commission are usual punishments for sins

of omission He that leaves a duty may soon be left to commit a crime.—*Gurnall.*

No sin is ever alone. Dr. Macdonald says, "There is no fault that does not bring its brothers and sisters and cousins to live with it."

Oh, how rare it is to find a soul still enough to hear God speak!—*Fenelon.*

Grace turns the serpent into a rod; but sin turns the rod into a serpent. The former turns poison into a remedy; but the latter turns the remedy into poison.—*Benjamin Beddome.*

Sorrow is sent for our instruction, just as we darken the cages of birds when we would teach them to sing.—*Jean Paul Richter.*

CXIX.

"THEN SAID HAGGAI, IF ONE THAT IS UNCLEAN BY A DEAD BODY TOUCH ANY OF THESE, SHALL IT BE UNCLEAN? AND THE PRIESTS ANSWERED AND SAID, IT SHALL BE UNCLEAN. "THEN ANSWERED HAGGAI, AND SAID, SO IS THIS PEOPLE, AND SO IS THIS NATION BEFORE ME, SAITH THE LORD; AND SO IS EVERY WORK OF THEIR HANDS; AND THAT WHICH THEY OFFER THERE IS UNCLEAN."—*Haggai* ii. 13, 14

THE prophet makes the priests witness against themselves and the people. This was a powerful means of forcing home the truth.

It is clear from verse 12 that the mere bearing of a holy thing did not enable the bearer to communicate consecration.

But the priests owned that the touch of an unclean person did communicate uncleanness.

What a picture! An unclean person making everything unclean wherever he laid his hand! He could not move without spreading defilement on all sides.

Such were the erring people of Haggai's day in the judgment of their God, and he never judges too severely.

Such are sinful men at this day.

I. THE TERRIBLE UNCLEANNESS. *Here we keep to our text.*

For a New Testament exposition, read Titus i. 15.

1. Common things are polluted by men of unclean nature.

Nothing is common or unclean naturally; for every creature of God is good. (1 Tim. iv. 4.) But in divers ways the things of ordinary life are made to be unclean,—

By making gods of them, saying, "What shall we eat?" &c.

By excess in the use of them. By gluttony, drunkenness, &c.

By excess in the keeping of them. A miser's goods are accursed.

By ingratitude concerning them. Then they remain unblessed.

2. Holy things are polluted by men of unclean nature.

They use the gospel as an excuse for sin.

They offer prayer in solemn mockery.

They make praise into a musical performance.

They turn the sacraments into hypocrisy or worse.

There is nothing so holy but that sin can defile it.

3. Good works are polluted when they come from evil men: "so is every work of their hands."

They can be charitable for ostentation.

They can be religious to be seen of men.

They can be sternly righteous in order to be revenged.

They can be humble to gain their ends.

4. Sacrifices are polluted when offered by unclean men: "and that which they offer there is unclean."

Their public thanksgivings are a falsehood.

Their solemn fasts are a mere comedy.

What a wretched condition is he in who, even in his holiest acts, is defiling everything! He may well pause and humble himself before God, for the more he does in his present state the more does he defile.

Sin has cast a serpent's trail over the whole universe, making the creation itself subject to vanity. What does man touch which he does not degrade and pollute? Here is a wide field for thought, and abundant cause for humiliation.

II. THE ALL-SUFFICIENT REMEDY. *Here we go beyond our text.*

In Numbers xix. we have the type of the great remedy, and a fuller account of the uncleanness which it removed.

In the rites used for purifying the unclean—

1. There was a sacrifice (Num. xix., verses 2–4): "A red heifer without spot." This must be slain. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Heb. ix. 22.
2. There was a burning: verses 5 and 6. Sin is hateful, and we must see it to be such; it must be burned without the camp.

8. There was a water of separation. Having been purged with blood of sacrifice, we must be sprinkled with water of sanctification.
4. There was an application with hyssop. Faith must receive the cleansing. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean."
5. This must cleanse our whole nature. See verse 19. There was a washing of the whole man and his garments.

All that this type intended may be found,—

In the water and the blood which flowed from the side of our Lord, manifesting the doubly cleansing power of his sacrifice: and

In the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit.

See, O sinner, your need of cleansing before you attempt anything.

Before this, nothing you are, or have, or do, is clean before God.

After this, all things shall be holy to you.

See to this cleansing at once, and all else will follow in due course.

VIVACITIES.

"My friends say everywhere that I am not a Christian. I have just given them the lie direct by performing my Easter devotions (*mes paques*) publicly, thus proving to all my lively desire to terminate my long career in the religion in which I was born, and I have fulfilled this important act after a dozen attacks of consecutive fever, which made me

fear I should die before I could assure you of my respect and my devotion."—*Voltaire, to Madame du Barri.* (What a specimen of polluted holy things!)

Those whose devotions are plausible, but whose conversation is wicked, will find their devotions unable to sanctify their enjoyments, but their wickedness prevailing to pollute them.

When we are employed in any good work, we should be jealous over ourselves, lest we render it unclean by our corruptions and mismanagements.—*Matthew Henry.*

Diogenes, standing beside a foul bath, was heard to exclaim, "Where shall those be washed who wash here?" When even the religious duties of men are defiled, what hope can they have of making themselves clean? Those who turn prayer into a mockery, and sacraments into a show, have turned medicine into poison; and how shall they be healed?

A child has taken an infectious disease. He comes to fondle you, and you push him away. He moves the furniture, and you command him to take his hands off. He must be shut up, and kept from contact with the household. Suppose he persists in leaving his room, and joining with the rest of the family. No matter how kind his motive, he is doing wrong and acting mischievously. The more industriously he works about the house, and runs to and fro, the more does he spread the disorder. The household work which he does would be well enough

if he were but in health: as it is, his every movement is a danger, and his best endeavors are perilous. The child must be healed before he can do real good in the family: while he is infected he pollutes all that he touches, and injures all whom he approaches. Oh, that unconverted men were wise enough to see that what they need, at first, is not so much work to do, as cleansing from pollution, in order that they may be able to do good works.

At one of the Ragged-schools in Ireland, a clergyman asked the question, "What is holiness?" After some pause, a poor Irish convert, in dirty, tattered rags, jumped up, and said, "Plaise your Rivrerence, it's to be clane inside.—*G. S. Bowes.*

CXX.

"FOR WHO HATH DESPISED THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS?"
Zechariah iv. 10.

GREAT numbers of persons do despise "the day of small things."

If they were wise, they would not do so; for it is not wise to despise anything, and to despise a thing because it is small is great folly.

A small thing may be greatly good, or terribly evil; and in neither case would it be prudent to despise it.

It is usually God's way to begin his great works with a day of small things.

Thus it is seen that there is nothing in the means themselves.

Thus the divine power is more fully displayed.

Thus faith is exercised, and made to learn many lessons.

Why should men despise what God ordains?

Who are those persons who dare act thus contemptuously? They are not entitled to give themselves such airs: yet they dare to do so.

They show their contempt in various ways.

They affect pity for such feebleness. Nehemiah iv. 2.

They decry and find fault. 1 Samuel xvii. 28.

They sneer, and ridicule. Matt. xiii. 55. Acts xvii. 18.

They leave alone, with silent neglect. Acts v. 38.

It is a sad pity when this contempt is poured upon a beginner in grace, for it may cause him sad distress and discouragement.

Our object at this time is to reprove those who despise the earlier and weaker works of grace in the soul. True it is "the day of small things," but this is to be rejoiced in, and is not to be despised.

Let us commune with—

I. THOSE WHO DESPISE OTHERS WHO ARE IN THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS.

1. Do you not know that there are babes in grace, and that these are true children of God? Do you doubt that evident fact?
2. Were you not once such little ones yourselves? If you never were, who are you to despise your betters?
3. Were not the greatest of the saints once very feeble? Would you have acted thus to them?
4. May not the strong be glad at times to be as sure of salvation as these little ones? Why despise those whom you may yet envy?
5. Does not our Lord care tenderly for the lambs? Is. xl. 11.
6. Has he not threatened all proud despisers? Matt. xviii. 6.

Who then dares despise the day of small things?

Who are those who are so wicked? They are the proud, the ignorant, the thoughtless, the unfeeling, the profane, and such like.

II. THOSE WHO DESPISE THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS IN THEMSELVES.

1. They will frequently fail to notice and nurture thoughts and feelings which would lead them to Christ.
2. They cannot believe that salvation can come by ordinary means, or through their present knowledge and emotions: these are too small in their esteem, they crave for signs and wonders.
3. Therefore they endeavor to kill their own thoughtfulness at its birth, and quench the spark of desire before it can become a flame. Yet these despised things might have led on to salvation.
4. If they would nurture their weak desires, and feeble resolves, and faint beliefs, and trembling hopes, good would come of them.
5. No doubt many think ill of their own condition when God thinks well of them. They judge that little faith, and little life, and little strength are useless; but the Lord thinks not so.

It is wise to look away, both from small things and great things, to Jesus. Let us see his day, and be glad. John viii. 56.

Let us trust in his finished work, and rejoice in his continued work.

"Rejoice, and see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel." See context.

III. THOSE WHO DO NOT DESPISE THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS.

1. Hopeful pastors. We are looking out for gracious signs, and are more apt to be misled by our sanguine hopes than to fall into the opposite fault of despising the day of small things.
2. Anxious parents. They long to see buds of grace in their children. The smallest signs of spiritual life would charm them.
3. Wise soul-winners. They rejoice to see "first the blade."
4. Jesus himself. He loves the little ones. Mark x. 14.

Come ye to him, all ye trembling souls!

MULTUM IN PARVO.

When the boy began to draw portraits upon his slate, and to sketch with charcoal, the great artist was in him in embryo. It was not every eye that could perceive his budding genius, but he who did so, and encouraged the youth to pursue art as his vocation, found a life-long satisfaction in having helped him. Had he sneered at the young draughtsman he would have lived to see his folly; but now

he takes pleasure in every triumph of the renowned painter. Some such joy, only of a higher and more spiritual order, will be yours if you stimulate early piety, and teach the tender heart the way to peace and holiness. To repress desires which are heaven ward, because they are attended with something of childishness, is wicked cruelty: prune the vine of its wild shoots, but do not uproot it. Foster and nurture even the tiniest sign of grace. "Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it:" Is. lxv. 8.

FEEBLEMIND.—I do not yet know all the truth; I am a very ignorant Christian man; sometimes, if I hear some rejoice in the Lord, it troubles me because I cannot do so too. It is with me as it is with a weak man among the strong, or as with a sick man among the healthy, or as a lamp despised. "He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease:" Job. xii. 5. So that I know not what to do.

GREATHEART.—But, brother, I have it in commission to comfort the feeble-minded, and to support the weak. You must needs go along with us: we will wait for you, we will lend you our help, we will deny ourselves of some things, both opinionative and practical, for your sake; we will not enter into doubtful disputations before you, we will be made all things to you rather than you shall be left behind. (Rom. xiv., 1 Cor. viii., ix. 22.)—*Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress."*

One afternoon, I noticed a young lady at the ser

vice, whom I knew to be a Sunday School teacher. After the service, I asked her where her class was. "Oh," said she, "I went to the school, and found only a little boy, and so I came away." "Only a little boy!" said I; "think of the value of one such soul! the fires of a Reformation may be slumbering in that tow-headed boy; there may be a young Knox, or a Wesley, or a Whitefield in your class."—*D. L. Moody.*

The little lichen imperceptibly deposits the first layer of soil upon barren rocks in mid-ocean, from which grow up all the luxuriant wealth and beauty of the spice-island. Ferns have seeds so extremely diminutive that for a long time it was doubted if they existed at all. Yet such a seed, altogether invisible to the naked eye, floats on long journeys through the air, and falls on some lichen-covered island, where it immediately fructifies, and covers the place with vegetation.

The moss is but a very little plant, yet when its seeds fall on deep, swampy, treacherous morasses, they grow up, and bind the ground together with such bands that it becomes quite safe to pass over,—building, in fact, a broad and durable bridge. "Throughout creation the grandest and most complicated ends are obtained by the employment of the simplest means." —*James Neil, in "Rays from the Realms of Nature."*

CXXI.

"SPEAK UNTO ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND, AND TO THE PRIESTS, SAYING, WHEN YE FASTED AND MOURNED IN THE FIFTH AND SEVENTH MONTH, EVEN THOSE SEVENTY YEARS, DID YE AT ALL FAST UNTO ME, EVEN TO ME?

"AND WHEN YE DID EAT, AND WHEN YE DID DRINK, DID NOT YE EAT FOR YOURSELVES, AND DRINK FOR YOURSELVES?"—*Zechariah* vii. 5, 6.

THE acceptableness of religious duties must not be taken for granted.

We should ask searching questions about them, for the Lord himself does so. It behoves hearers to be very attentive to close personal enquiries as to their holy things.

During long years, "even those seventy years," pious observances may have been kept up, and yet there may have been no virtue in them.

This fact makes it wise for us all to question ourselves, for we may have been habitual religionists, and yet may also never have done anything as "unto the Lord."

Two reflections rise before our mind:—

I RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES SHOULD BE UNTO THE LORD. "Did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?"

1. They should be attended to out of respect to his

command. Ceremonies which are not of his ordaining are mere will-worship. We partake of ordinances, not because of custom, or church rule, but "unto the Lord." Rom. xiv. 6.

2. They should be carried out with a dependence upon God's grace to make them useful to us, for outward forms are nothing of themselves. Unless the Spirit of God apply them to us, they are empty buckets drawn up from a dry well. John vi. 63.

3. They should be fulfilled with such an eye to God as their nature and meaning suggest: as for instance, in fasting there should be sorrow towards God for having grieved him; and in holy feasting the joy must not be carnal, but "joy in the Lord."

4. They should be accompanied with that spiritual understanding without which they are mere play-acting in the sight of God. There must be the true fasting, which is abstinence from sin; and the true feasting, which is the reception of Christ with joy.

5. They should be attended to with a view to glorifying God in them. For this end come we to baptism, communion, praise, etc.

If these things are not done unto the Lord, what are they but the rites of atheism?—or a sort of witchcraft, a repetition of incantations, genuflexions, and the like? Isaiah lxvi. 8.

II. RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES MAY BE UNTO OURSELVES. "Did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?"

They are so most clearly—

1. When the spiritual element is absent. Then even in the Sacred Supper there is nothing more than mere eating and drinking, as in the case of the Corinthian church. How generally have religious festivals become mere excuses for banqueting!
2. When the ordinance is attended to because it brings personal credit. Motives of custom, respectability, or dignity, may lead men even to the table of the Lord. This is eating for ourselves.
3. When the outward observance is used as a means of pacifying the conscience, and taken as a spiritual opiate. Without drawing near to God, the man feels easier because he has performed a bit of pious ritual. This is eating and drinking for ourselves.
4. When outward ritual is practised in the hope that we shall be saved thereby. The motive is religious selfishness, and the act must be unacceptable.
5. When there is no intent to please God therein: for as the intent is, such is the act; and when there is no intent toward God, the whole matter falls short of acceptance with God.

See how vain are the religious performances of unbelievers. Read verses 1 to 3 of this chapter.

Let us come to Jesus, who is the sum and substance of all fasts, and feasts, and all else of right observance.

Let us live as unto the Lord. Rom. xiv. 8.

Striking Paragraphs.

If, after thou hast heard so many masses, matins, and even-songs, and hast received holy bread and holy water, and the bishop's blessing, or the cardinal's or the pope's, thou wilt be more kind to thy neighbor, and love him better, and be more obedient to thy superiors, more merciful and ready to forgive; if thou dost more despise the world, and art more athirst for spiritual things, then do such things increase grace. *If not, they are a lie.—Tyndale.*

A certain king would build a cathedral, and, that the credit of it might be all his own, he forbade anyone to contribute to its erection in the least degree. A tablet was placed in the side of the building, and on it his name was carved as the builder. But one night he saw in a dream an angel, who came down and erased his name; and the name of a poor widow appeared in its stead. This was three times repeated, when the enraged king summoned the woman before him, and demanded, "What have you been doing, and why have you broken my commandment?" The trembling widow replied, "I loved the Lord, and longed to do something for his name, and for

the building up of his church. I was forbidden to touch it in any way, so in my poverty I brought a wisp of hay for the horses that drew the stones." Then the king saw that he had labored for his own glory, but the widow for the glory of God, and he commanded that her name should be inscribed upon the tablet.—*Cyclopædia of Illustrative Anecdotes.*

In no part of the great universe is any being fervently *devout by accident.* Everywhere, even in heaven, creatures are devout from purpose, design, endeavor. Eminently is this true on earth; no man ever *happened* to be religious.—*Dr. Stoughton, in "Lights of the World."*

* There is an Eastern story of a Sultan who overslept himself, so as not to awaken at the hour of prayer. So the devil came, and waked him, and told him to get up and pray. "Who are you?" said the Sultan. "Oh, no matter!" replied the other, "my act is good, is it not? No matter who does the good action, so long as it is good." "Yes," replied the Sultan, "but I think you are Satan. I know your face; you have some bad motive." "But," said the other, "I am not so bad as I am painted. I was an angel once, and still keep some of my original goodness." "That's all very well," replied the sagacious and prudent Caliph, "but you are the tempter: that's your business; and I wish

* A story which needs careful telling, and then may be most useful.

to know why you want me to get up and pray." "Well," said the devil, with a flirt of impatience, "if you must know, I will tell you. If you had slept and forgotten your prayers, you would have been sorry for it afterwards, and penitent; but if you go on as now, and do not neglect a single prayer for ten years, you will be so satisfied with yourself that it will be worse for you than if you had missed one sometimes, and repented of it. God loves your fault mixed with penitence more than your virtue seasoned with pride."

What is all righteousness that men devise,
What—but a sordid bargain for the skies?
But Christ as soon would abdicate his own,
As stoop from heaven to sell the proud a throne.

—*Cowper.*

CXXII.

"As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.

"Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even to-day do I declare that I will render double unto thee."—*Zechariah* ix. 11. 12.

LET us commence our meditation with the description of our Lord which is given us in verses 9 and 10.

Here we see his kingdom, his character, his power to save, his lowliness, the weapons of his conquest—"speak peace unto the heathen," and the ultimate extent of his dominion—"to the ends of the earth."

Because of him, and through him, there is mercy for the oppressed and troubled ones in Zion—"as for thee also," verse 11.

This is a wonderful text for those who are in the lowest possible state of mind. May the Lord make it a blessing to them!

Our subjects of thought shall be,—

I. Condition of the sorrowing ones. "Prisoners in the pit wherein is no water."

They are described as—

1 Prisoners: bound, freedom gone, unable to do

as they would, in the power of another, miserable.

2. Prisoners in a pit: escape impossible, darkness intolerable, fate unavoidable, present discomfort terrible.

3. Prisoners in a pit wherein is no water: comfortless, and likely to perish of thirst. They find no comfort in sin, nor indeed in any thing else. They are, however, though less comfortable, all the less likely to be drowned when there is no water. Comfort in sin is deadly: the absence of that comfort is hopeful.

Thus are many oppressed souls helplessly in the power of despair till the Lord comes to rescue them.

II. CAUSE OF THEIR DELIVERANCE. "I have sent forth thy prisoners."

1. The Lord Omniscient spies them out in their dungeon, and he knows whose prisoners they are.

2. He has the power and the right to set free prisoners. Who can shut up those whom he delivers?

3. He sends them forth from the pit. He grants life, light, and liberty to them. Their feet are free, and they are on free soil.

4. He sends them forth by "the blood."

By the expiation made for sin before God.

By the peace created in the conscience of the penitent.

5. He sends them forth by what is called "the blood of thy covenant"—the covenant made between Zion and her King.

Let a soul once know the blessedness of "the covenant," and the sealing power of "the blood," and it is a prisoner no longer.

III. COURSE COMMENDED TO THE DELIVERED ONES. "Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope."

They are out of the pit of despair, but not "out of the wood" of trouble: they have hope of salvation, but they need salvation itself.

It will be their wisdom—

1. To make hope their characteristic. When they feel like prisoners, let them hope, and so become "prisoners of hope."
2. To make Christ their Stronghold.
3. To turn to him every day, and all the day.
4. To turn to him specially when they feel like prisoners.

When a man is freed from death and despair, he is still to come to Jesus more and more. "To whom coming," &c. (1 Pet. ii. 4).

IV. COMFORT GIVEN TO THOSE WHO TURN TO THE STRONGHOLD. "Even to-day do I declare that I will render double unto thee."

1. God is speedy in his comforts to those who turn to Jesus. "Even to-day do I declare."
2. God is abundant in his mercy: "I will render double unto thee."

The double of your trouble. Job xiii. 10.
The double of your expectation. Is. lxi. 7.
The double of your attainments: "grace for grace" (John i. 16).
The double of your largest faith. Eph. iii. 20.

3. God is consoling in his promise; for it is—
Plain: "I declare."
Present: "Even to-day do I declare."
Positive: "I declare that I will."
Personal: "I will render unto thee."

Let us glorify the Lord for lifting us out of the pit.

Let us glorify the Lord Jesus for being our Stronghold.

Let us glorify the Lord for that double portion which he allots us.

Free Thoughts.

Here God the Father speaks to Christ with relation to some covenant between them both; and what covenant can that be but the covenant of redemption? All the temporal, spiritual, and eternal deliverances which we enjoy, they swim to us through the blood of that covenant that is passed between the Father and the Son. By virtue of the same blood of the covenant, wherewith we are reconciled, justified, and saved, were the Jews delivered from their Babylonish captivity. The Babylonish captivity, thraldom, and dispersion, was that waterless pit, that dirty dungeon, that uncomfortable and forlorn condi-

tion, out of which they were delivered by virtue of the blood of the covenant; that is by virtue of the blood of Christ, figured by the blood that was sprinkled upon the people, and by virtue of the covenant confirmed thereby, Exod. xxiv. 8; Ps. lxxiv. 20; Heb. xiii. 20. Look, as all the choice mercies, the high favors, the noble blessings, that the saints enjoy, are purchased by the blood of Christ; so they are made sure to the saints by the same blood; "by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners." Whatever desperate distresses, and deadly dangers, the people of God may fall into, yet they are "prisoners of hope," and may look for deliverance by the blood of the covenant.—*Thomas Brooks.*

With what gratitude and joy should these intimamations of hope be received by those who are naturally in so miserable a condition! It is a celebrated story that, when Titus Flamininus, at the public games, proclaimed the liberty of Greece, after it had been conquered by the Romans, the auditors were at first lost in a silent amazement, and then burst out into one continued shout for two hours together, "*Liberty! Liberty!*" Methinks such joy, and greater than this, should appear amongst miserable sinners when these proclamations for liberty are made. And are they not now made? Have I not been telling you, from the Word of God, that though you were condemned under the righteous sentence of the law, through a Redeemer that sen

tence may be reversed, your souls may be restored to life and happiness? Have I not been proving that, though Satan held you in a dark captivity, yet by the law of the great Redeemer you may be rescued from his hands, and made more than con querors through him? Have I not told you that, notwithstanding the painful and the fruitless struggle which you have hitherto had with the feebleness and corruptions of a depraved nature, you may still receive those communications of the Spirit which will purify and strengthen you, and enable you to perfect holiness in the fear of God? . . . Prisoners of hope, will you despair?—*Dr. Doddridge. Sermon on this text.*

CXXIII.

"I HAVE MERCY UPON THEM: AND THEY SHALL BE AS THOUGH I HAD NOT CAST THEM OFF: FOR I AM THE LORD THEIR GOD, AND WILL HEAR THEM."—*Zechariah* x. 6.

THE manner in which hope can come to sinners: "I have mercy upon them." Mercy abides in the heart of God even after the hope of it has left the human bosom.

The token that God's mercy is coming, and that it is indeed come, is prayer. "Behold he prayeth" is the sure indication of coming deliverance. Acts ix. 11.

God had observed prayer in them, for he said, "I will hear them."

The result of mercy's coming is exceedingly delightful: "They shall be as though I had not cast them off."

This promise may be applied,—

I. IN GENERAL, TO ALL PENITENT SINNERS.

God's mercy in many ways restores men to their lost position: and in some senses even to their pristine condition before the fall.

1. The forgiveness of sin, and justification by faith, make them as acceptable as if they had never transgressed.

2. The renovation of nature, by the regenerating work of the Holy Ghost, creates in them as pure an inner life as Adam ever had.
3. Restoration to paradise. Even now we dwell with God in a blessed state, for the Lord hath raised us to the heavenlies in Christ.
4. Redemption from the curse. The curse is clean gone for ever, through him who was made a curse for us. Gal. iii. 13. The anger of God is removed from us for ever.
5. Engagement in service. We are honorably employed, and could not have been more so had we never sinned.
6. Communion with God. This we enjoy as truly as unfallen humanity could have done. Indeed, the Spirit of God dwells in the regenerate, and this is not said of Adam.
7. Eternal life. We are preserved from penal death. As Jesus lives so must we. John xiv. 19. There is no fear that we shall eat and die, for the Lord has given us eternal life. and we shall never perish. John x. 28.

The further working out of the likeness between the state of the saved and that of Adam in the garden, may be made highly instructive.

II. In particular, to penitent backsliders. Only return unto God, and live in his fear, and you shall enjoy all the blessedness of your best spiritual state.

You shall again enjoy—

1. The complete removal of your guilt, and shall have no more consciousness of sin; thus shall you return to rest of soul.
2. Renewed joy, as in the days of your first love.
3. Restored purity of heart, as in the times before you wandered.
4. Fresh communion with God, and guidance from his Holy Spirit. Is not this your cry, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me?" Ps. li. 11.
5. New usefulness. You shall teach transgressors the pardoning ways of Jehovah. Ps. li. 13.
6. Restoration to the church, from which you may have been excluded. Your brethren will rejoice over you, and so will your God.
7. Future upholding. You shall watch against temptation all the more earnestly, and so you shall stand the more firmly through grace. God can make use of your unhappy fall to teach you many precious lessons.

Suppose this invitation to turn unto the Lord should be refused—

It will be a wanton rejection of generous love. There can never be a fairer offer.

This will increase the uneasiness of a guilty conscience.

This will lead to the fear that the refuser is not one of the Lord's chosen.

But we hope better things of you, and things which

accompany salvation, though we thus speak. We are jealous lest you miss the day of grace.

At once confess your sin, and humbly plead the word of the Lord, "I have mercy upon them."

Then cry out in prayer, for it is written, "I will hear them."

Then, in faith in the name of Jesus, hang upon the promise, "They shall be as though I had not cast them off."

By the mercy of God, we entreat you to seek his face at once, with true heart, and resolute importunity.

SELECTIONS.

The fall is a greater mystery than the Redemption. He who has had experience of the one may well accept the revelation of the other.—*C. Vaughan.*

Now thou hast avenged
Supplanted Adam, and, by vanquishing
Temptation, hast regain'd lost Paradise,
And frustrated the conquest fraudulent.
He nevermore henceforth will dare set foot
In Paradise to tempt; his snares are broke:
For, though that seat of earthly bliss be fail'd,
A fairer Paradise is founded now
For Adam and his chosen sons, whom thou,
A Saviour, art come down to reinstall,
Where they shall dwell secure, when time shall be,
Of Tempter and temptation without fear.—*Milton.*

The end of the gospel is life and perfection . . . It is to make us partakers of the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness. . . . God him-

self cannot make me happy, if he be only without me; unless he give me a participation of himself and his own likeness unto my soul.—*Cudworth.*

He raised me from the deeps of sin,
The gates of gaping hell,
And fixed my standing more secure
Than 'twas before I fell.—*Watts.*

A man upon the way, having accidentally lost his purse, is questioned by his fellow-traveller where he had it last. "Oh!" says he, "I am confident that I drew it out of my pocket when I was in such a town, at such an inn." "Why, then!" says the other, "there is no better way to have it again than by going back to the place where you last had it." This is the case of many a man in these loose, unsettled times; they have lost their love to Christ, and his truth, since their corn and wine and oil have increased; since outward things are in abundance added unto them they have slighted the light of God's countenance. When they were poor and naked of all worldly comfort, then they sought God's face both early and late, and nothing was more dear and precious unto them than the truth of Christ. What, then, is to be done to recover this lost love to Christ? Back again, back again directly where you last had it! Back to the sign of the broken and contrite heart! There it was that you drew it out into good words and better works; and though it be since lost in the crowd of worldly employments, there and nowhere else, you shall be sure to find it again.—*Spencer's "Things New and Old."*

CXXIV.

"AND I WILL STRENGTHEN THEM IN THE LORD; AND THEY SHALL WALK UP AND DOWN IN HIS NAME, SAITH THE LORD."—*Zechariah* x. 12.

ENLARGE upon the reference of the text and on the whole chapter to the Lord's ancient people, the Jews.

They are so much forgotten, and so often persecuted, and so generally despised, that we do well to think upon the prophecies of a glorious future, which the Lord God has spoken concerning them.

But the heritage of the natural and typical Israel belongs, in its spiritual meaning, to the spiritual Israel; and this promise is ours.

To those who lament their weakness the promise of the text is peculiarly cheering.

I. DIVINE STRENGTHENING PROMISED. "I will strengthen them in the Lord."

1. It is painfully needed.

We are naturally weak as water.

After soul-sickness we are sadly feeble.

In the presence of great labors we feel our weakness.

We want strength for watching, walking, working, and warring.

2. It is freely promised. See also verse 6.
   Justice might have left us to ourselves.
   Tender love observes our need.
   Infinite power abundantly supplies it.
3. It is divinely bestowed: "*I* will strengthen them.' Hence it is—
   Certain in accomplishment.
   Honorable in reception. How ennobling to receive strength immediately from the Lord Jehovah!
   Unlimited in communication, if we have but faith to receive it.
4. It is gradually received. We go from strength to strength.
   By use of the means of grace: prayer, communion with God, spiritual exercise, experience, etc.
   By the silent operations of the Holy Ghost.
   By the growth of each holy grace, and the increase of life within.
5. It is delightfully perceived.
   An excellent illustration is that of a sick man recovering strength.
   As in his case, so in ours,—
      Appetite returns: we relish the Word.
      Difficulties vanish: burdens grow light, etc.
      Employment is desired: strength pines for exercise.
      Expansive views are obtained. We walk abroad with delight, and leave the

narrow chamber in which a sickly soul is shut up.

Pleasure is enjoyed, and gratitude is excited.

6. It is sufficiently continued.

God continues to strengthen us day by day.

He increases our strength as it is required.

He makes *his* strength more and more apparent in our weakness, till we know no power but *his*.

II. CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY PREDICTED. "They shall walk up and down in his name."

1. They shall enjoy ease,—implied in walking up and down.
2. They shall possess freedom: it is the gait of liberty.
3. They shall be active for the Lord, in varied forms of service.
4. They shall persevere in such activity, walking up and down; and evermore crying joyously, "Onward and Upward!"
5. They shall consecrate that activity with care: "they shall walk in his name,"—doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Sick souls shall exhibit the activities of convalescence when the Lord imparts strength to them. Those who are recovering from sickness know how happy such a condition usually is.

III. BOTH BLESSINGS GUARANTEED.

1. Here is the divine "I will" of omnipotent grace.

2. Here is the divine "they shall" of consecrated free-agency.
3 Here is the divine "saith the Lord" of infallible faithfulness.

All these united make our text a glorious one.

Are you sick, sorry, weak? This sacred text is for you.

See where your strength lieth! Look to the Strong for strength.

Believe in Jesus to obtain it! He is ready to bestow it.

When you have it—use it abundantly! Help the weak, bear the burdens of others, serve the Lord with gladness, and glorify God.

Words of a great Preacher.

Sir Walter Scott relates in his autobiography that when he was a child, one of his legs was paralyzed and when medical skill failed, a kind uncle induced him to exert the muscles of the powerless limb by drawing a gold watch before him on the floor, tempting him to creep after it, and thus keeping up and gradually increasing vital action and muscular force. So God deals with us in our spiritual childhood, and the weakness of our faith. How weak our efforts; how slow our movements! But spiritual vitality is elicited, developed, strengthened by those efforts and movements, slow and weak as they are.

Every man needs *strength*. We ask for daily bread: and we ask for it as a means of renewing our

strength. We have as much need to ask for strength, as for deliverance from evil, and for the forgiveness of our trespasses. There are certain things to be done, certain things to be endured, and things to be resisted, which can be performed, and borne, and stood against, only by power of a certain kind, and by that power in a certain degree. Nor is strength needful merely for doing and for suffering. It is also necessary for enjoyment. Weakness is so much less of life. The feeble live but in a low degree.

Lack of strength is more serious than lack of any kind of outward possession. A weak rich man is in a far worse position than a strong poor man; and the strong poor man is really the wealthier. Weakness lessens work, reduces enjoyment, and greatly aggravates suffering of any kind. In many instances, moreover, it is the cause of wickedness,—leading directly to transgression, and exposing the individual to fierce and exceedingly dangerous temptations. So that, as a means of preserving ourselves against sin, we should ask daily for strength.

Every man needs strength; but no man has within him strength equal to the demands that are made upon him. He requires *strengthening*.

The Christian is no exception to this rule. He needs strength. His conversion was not translation to inactivity, to ease and to unbroken quiet. His work is not the ceaseless singing of psalms while he reclines upon green pastures, and sits beside still waters. There are times when he lies down in green pastures; but he lies down wearied; and he lies

down that he may rise again a stronger man, to enter upon fiercer battles, and to do harder work. We rest, not for resting's sake, but that we may work again.

Brethren, a Christian's strength can come only by his being strengthened. There is not within the man, as a man, nor within him as a Christian, any stock or store of strength given him at the commencement of his life. Day by day, stage after stage, first as a babe, then as a young man, and then as a father in Christ, does the man need strengthening. And what a glorious thing it is that, instead of our resources being given to us at the beginning of our Christian life, they are supplied to us as we need them. Does not this arrangement keep us in close communion with the Father of our spirits, and with the Source of all energy and wisdom? So that the very application to God, apart from the things which application always secures, tends to strengthen you.—*Samuel Martin.*

CXXV.

"AND I WILL POUR UPON THE HOUSE OF DAVID, AND UPON THE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM, THE SPIRIT OF GRACE AND OF SUPPLICATIONS: AND THEY SHALL LOOK UPON ME WHOM THEY HAVE PIERCED, AND THEY SHALL MOURN FOR HIM, AS ONE MOURNETH FOR HIS ONLY SON, AND SHALL BE IN BITTERNESS FOR HIM, AS ONE THAT IS IN BITTERNESS FOR HIS FIRSTBORN."—*Zechariah* xii. 10.

NOTE the remarkable change of persons: "look upon me," and "mourn for him." Such changes indicate unity and distinctness; and afford us a hint as to the Unity of the Godhead, and the Trinity of the Persons.

He who speaks is Jehovah, "which stretcheth forth the heavens," (see verse 1,) and yet he says "me, whom they have pierced."

It is Jehovah-Jesus who is pierced, and pours out the Spirit of grace.

It is a marvel that Jesus should be crucified when the Jewish law required stoning; and that, when crucified, the Roman soldier, though ignorant of the prophecy, should pierce him with his spear.

The conversion of the Jews is here promised: they will be converted to a crucified Christ.

They, by their unbelief and hatred, were guilty of his death: let us pray that they may be saved by it right speedily.

Our text reveals their way of repentance, and this must also be ours.

Evangelical sorrow for sin is to be our subject at this time.

We shall remark that,—

I. IT IS CREATED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT. "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications."

1. It is not produced by mere conscience, nor by terror, nor by the use of a form of penitence; much less by music, pictures, &c.
2. It comes as a gift of grace: "I will pour." The understanding is enlightened, the heart renewed, &c., by a distinct act of the Spirit of God, sent forth by the Father.
3. It is attended by prayer: "grace and of supplications." In this differing from remorse, which never prays.
4. It is continuous, for it comes with abiding things, such as the fountain opened (see next chapter); and it flows from an abiding source, for the Spirit of grace and of supplications abides in the saints.

II. IT IS CAUSED BY LOOKING TO JESUS. "They shall look upon me, whom they have pierced."

It cannot, therefore, prepare for that look: we look to Jesus as we are, and the look makes penitents of us.

1. We see the horrible hatred which sin bears toward purity, for it slew the Holy One, and that when he was arrayed in the most lovely and attractive form.
2. We see its ingratitude to love. Sin repays infinite compassion with inveterate hate, and therefore crucifies Jesus.
3. We see its abhorrence of God. It would slay *him* if it could, and it did so in effect. Sin is Deicidal in intent and tendency.
4. We see that such is the terrible guilt of *our* sin that nothing but an infinite sacrifice could atone for it.
5. We see that we have entered into the sin of Calvary by our conduct towards the Lord Jesus in our rejecting and resisting him and his cause. We have repeated the crime of the cross.

III. IT IS THE CHIEF OF SORROWS. "They shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son."

1. Comparable to a terrible parental agony, for an only son, or for a first-born child: both very special sources of grief.
2. Comparable also to the national mourning for Josiah. See verse 11. Never nation sustained greater loss than Judah when it lost Josiah, and the people showed it by the national lamentation. Such is a penitent's sorrow at the death of Jesus.

3. It is personal and private. See verses 12 to 14.
4. It is spreading and social. "The land shall mourn:" verse 12.

IV. IT IS NOT IN ITSELF THE CLEANSING FOR SIN.

By it we confess the crime, but cannot *thereby* remove it. Conviction is a glass to show our spots, not a bath to cleanse them.

1. It acknowledges our need of the fountain; but it is not itself a fountain of cleansing.
2. It goes with the saving look to Jesus, but it is no rival to it.
3. It leads away from self, and even from its own self.
4. It leads to Jesus: we mourn *for him;* and this linking us with Jesus is most operative upon our hearts.

Come, bleeding heart, and look to Jesus for healing!

Come, hard heart, and look to Jesus for brokenness!

Come, careless heart, for the sight of Jesus may arrest even thee!

[*For variety we add a second outline on the same text.*]

CXXVI.

"THEY SHALL BE IN BITTERNESS FOR HIM."—*Zechariah* xii. 10.

WHEN the Jews receive Jesus as Messiah, they shall look upon him as pierced and slain: and the first result will be bitter repentance. It is the same with us. Of all sights, a sight of Jesus crucified is the sweetest; but at the same time it causes bitterness.

I. OUR FIRST SIGHT OF CHRIST BRINGS BITTERNESS.

1. For not having known his preciousness before. What a loss!
2. For having slighted such love so long. What crime upon crime!
3. From fear lest he should not be ours after all. This causes a bitter pang, an anxious grief of soul.
4. Sin, its greatness, and its effects, are seen in his cruel death; and this makes us deplore *our* guilt, and *his* woes.
5. The wrath of God, its justice and terribleness, are also seen at the cross, and we tremble.
6. Dread of never being forgiven, and a sense that we can never forgive ourselves, are mingled in one bitter draught.

II. OUR CONTINUED SIGHT OF CHRIST WORKS IN US THROUGHOUT LIFE A MEASURE OF THE SAME BITTERNESS.

1. His great love, when better known, brings deeper grief for sin.
2. It inspires a direr dread of grieving him.
3. It creates a deeper regret for our present unworthiness.
4. It inspires a greater horror at man's rejection of him, while we see thousands around us perishing by that madness.
5. It promotes a more overwhelming sympathy with Jesus in his striving against the evil which he died to destroy.

III. THIS BITTERNESS HAS MOST GRACIOUS EFFECTS.

1. It works great hatred of sin, and a tender and careful avoiding of it.
2. It makes Christ very sweet.
3. It makes worldly joys and temptations tasteless.
4. It removes the bitterness of affliction, pain, and death.
5. It prevents the sinful bitterness of anger, etc., at persecution.
6. It has an unutterable sweetness in it. We come to relish repentance, and to feel a pleasure in lowly grief for Jesus.

NAILS.

It is a sweet saying of one of old, "Let a man grieve for his sin, and then joy for his grief."

I see the crowd in Pilate's hall, I mark their wrathful mien;
Their shouts of "Crucify!" appal, with blasphemy between,
And of that shouting multitude I feel that I am one;
And in that din of voices rude, I recognize my own.

I see the scourges tear his back, I see the piercing crown,
And of that crowd who smite and mock I feel that I am one;
Around yon cross, the throng I see, mocking the Sufferer's groan,
Yet still my voice it seems to be,—as if I mocked alone.

'Twas I that shed the sacred blood, I nailed him to the tree,
I crucified the Christ of God, I joined the mockery;
Yet not the less that blood avails to cleanse away my sin,
And not the less that cross prevails to give me peace within.

We must nail our sins to the cross of Christ, fasten them upon the tree on which he suffered. Sin will begin to die within a man upon the sight of Christ on the cross, for the cross of Christ accuses sin, shames sin, and by a secret virtue destroys the very heart of sin. We must use sin as Christ was used when he was made sin for us; we must lift it up, and make it naked by confession of it to God; we must fasten the hands and feet of it by repentance, and pierce the heart of it by godly sorrow.—*Byfield.*

I am no preacher, let this hint suffice—
The cross once seen is death to every vice;
Else he that hung there suffered all his pain,
Bled, groan'd, and agonized, and died, in vain.—*Cowper.*

Newton's hymn, "In evil long I took delight," describes the experience of one who was brought to repentance and salvation by the sight of Christ crucified.

Now, to make and keep the heart soft and tender, the consideration of Christ's dolorous passion must needs be of singular use and efficacy; as the sight of Cæsar's bloody robes greatly affected the people of Rome, and edged them on to revenge his death.—*Trapp.*

CXXVII.

"AND THE LAND SHALL MOURN, EVERY FAMILY APART; THE FAMILY OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID APART, AND THEIR WIVES APART; THE FAMILY OF THE HOUSE OF NATHAN APART, AND THEIR WIVES APART;

"THE FAMILY OF THE HOUSE OF LEVI APART, AND THEIR WIVES APART; THE FAMILY OF SHIMEI APART, AND THEIR WIVES APART;

"ALL THE FAMILIES THAT REMAIN, EVERY FAMILY APART, AND THEIR WIVES APART."—*Zechariah* xii. 12-14.

TRUE repentance is attended with mourning. It may not in itself be sorrow, but a repentance which did not include sorrow for sin would be a mere pretence. It is a change of mind, and that change involves sorrow for the past.

We have need to stand in doubt of that repentance which hath no tear in its eye, no mourning in its heart.

Even when Christ is clearly seen, and pardon is enjoyed, mourning for sin does not cease; say rather, it is both deepened and purified.

This mourning has one special characteristic that it is personal, the act of each individual, and the act of the individual apart from any of his fellows. Its watchword is "apart."

I. THE INDIVIDUALIZING EFFECT OF SORROW FOR SIN. Observe the many times in which we here have the word "apart."

1. It is seen even when that mourning is universal. "The land shall mourn, every family apart." The widest spread of grace will not diminish its power over each separate person.
2. It will be seen in the separation of one family from another when the mourning is common, and most families repent. How much more when only a few households worship God!
3. It is seen in the distinction between family and family even when both fear the Lord. Each family has its peculiar sin, and a speciality must be made in the confession of each one.

The royal family: or rich: or influential: "the family of the house of David apart."

The prophet's family: the family at the manse: "the family of the house of Nathan apart."

The priest's family; the family of the church-officer, or the teacher, &c.: "the family of the house of Levi apart."

The ordinary family: the household of the trader, workman, &c.: "the family of Shimei apart."

Each family has its neglected duties, evil habits, differences, unconverted members, besetments, &c.

4. It is seen in the individualizing of those nearest akin: "and their wives apart." These are

one flesh; but when their hearts are made flesh, each one mourns alone.

Common sin in husbands and wives should be mourned in common; holy joy, and holy grief, and much of devotion should be united; but in seeking the Lord by repentance each one must come alone.

This personality of holy grief has been stigmatized as morbid, self-conscious, and selfish; but those who thus speak are strangers to spiritual facts, and cavil for the mere sake of cavilling.

II. How does this individuality show itself?

Of course, from the nature of things, it differs in each case, but—

1. Each individual sees most his own sin: he is alone as to *character*.
2. Each individual desires to be alone as to *place*. No matter where, whether at the bed-side, or in the field, or in the barn: but solitude is desired, and must be obtained.
3. Each individual has his own *time*. At once the penitent must mourn, whether it be morning, noon, or night: he cannot be timed by regulation.
4. Each individual has his own *manner*. Some are silent; others cry aloud. One weeps, another cannot literally do so, and it is all the more sad. One feels broken in heart, another laments his hardness, &c.
5. Each individual has his own *secret*. None can

enter into it even if they would do so. Each mourner has a secret hidden away in his own soul, and he cannot reveal it to men.

III. How do we account for this individuality?

1. In part it is accounted for by a natural and justifiable shame, which prevents our confessing all our sins before another.
2. The heart desires to come to God himself, and the presence of a third person would be an interruption.
3. The man is conscious that his guilt was all his own, and as he dissociates everyone else from it, he instinctively comes to God apart, and solely on his own account.
4. This is the sign of sincerity. Sham piety talks about religion as national, and delights to display itself in the assembly, or in the street; true godliness is of the heart, and being "in spirit and in truth," it is deeply personal.
5. This is the mark of spiritual life with its individual emotions, needs, struggles, desires, regrets, confessions, &c. No two living men are quite alike outwardly, and certainly none are so inwardly; therefore, before the Lord they must exhibit a separate personal existence.

Practise much self-examination; minute, and searching.

Realize the fact that you must die apart, and, in a sense, be judged, and sentenced apart. Never forget your own individuality. You must have Christ for yourself, and be born again yourself, or you are lost.

Go forth and bless all the world when you are yourself prepared for such work. Light your own torch, or you cannot enlighten others. There is no selfishness in seeking to be made unselfish, and that is what grace alone can do for you.

Personalities.

Let the question of eternity have a monopoly in you. It is an intensely personal question; but instead of making you selfish, it will expand your heart. He who has never felt for his own soul cannot feel for another's.—*Brownlow North.*

Personal private faults must be privately confessed. It is not meet a wife should know all the bosom-sins of him in whose bosom she lieth. Perchance being now offended for not hearing her husband's prayers, she would be more offended if she heard them. Nor hath she just cause to complain, seeing herein Nathan's wife is equal with Nathan himself; what liberty she alloweth is allowed her, and she may, as well as her husband, claim the privilege privately and apart, to pour forth her soul unto God in her daily devotions. Yet man and wife, at other times, ought to communicate in their prayers, all others excluded.—*Thomas Fuller.*

The question "Guilty?" or "Not Guilty?" must

be put to each prisoner separately, and each one must answer to his name, and put in his personal plea. Should a pardon be granted, it must bear the individual's name, and it must be issued distinctly *to him*, or it will be a document of no value to him. In every case, the guilt and the pardon must have a personal bearing: but how hard it is to make a man see this! Oh, that we could preach in the "thou-and-thee" style, and could make each hearer feel that we were as personal as Nathan when he said, "Thou art the man!" If our hearers will not cry, "Lord, is it I?" we must go to them with the word, "I have a message from God unto thee."

CXXVIII.

"I HAVE LOVED YOU, SAITH THE LORD. YET YE SAY, WHEREIN HAST THOU LOVED US?"—*Malachi* i. 2.

ISRAEL under Malachi was in a captious, querulous condition; his brief prophecy is full of unbelieving questions, in which man seems bent upon having the last word with God.

The text might be treated as bearing upon our own favored nation, for God has been very gracious to Britain, and Britain is sadly ungrateful.

We prefer to consider Israel as the type of the election of grace.

It occurs even to the chosen, when grace runs low, to fall into an ill humor, and to appear beaten down, depressed, and full of sullen unbelief. This is a very wretched state of affairs.

With this state of heart we deal.

I. GOD'S LOVE DECLARED. "I have loved you, saith the Lord."

To every believer the special love of God is declared in the Scriptures, and to that love the text refers. This is clear if we observe the words which follow:—"Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau." This is the precise language used by Paul when speaking of the election of grace. Rom. ix. 13.

To every believer this love has been shown in—

1. Election in Christ Jesus from of old.
2. Covenant engagements made by Christ on his behalf.
3. Accomplished Redemption by the Lord Jesus.
4. Regeneration and the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus.
5. Pardon of sin, justification by faith, adoption, sanctification, &c.
6. Preservation to this hour, and promise for all future time.

This is a scanty list of the ways by which the Lord has said to each regenerate soul, "I have loved you."

Do we not remember times of love when this was personally sealed upon our hearts by the Holy Spirit?

Even now the Lord speaks thus to his redeemed by his Word, and by his Spirit. Do they not hear it? Are they not touched with so gracious and condescending an avowal of love?

II. GOD'S LOVE QUESTIONED. "Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?"

This is a shocking and disgraceful thing; but, alas, it indicates a condition of heart which has been seen far too frequently.

Such a question has been asked—

1. Under great afflictions in which there seemed no relief. Petulantly the sorrowing one has questioned divine love.

2. In sight of the prosperous wicked in their day of pride many a poor despised believer has rashly doubted the special love of God.
3. In times of grievous doubt as to one's personal salvation, and under heavy temptations of Satan, the same doubt has arisen.
4. Alas, this has also happened when, immersed in worldliness, the man for the time has lost all sight and sense of spiritual things, and has treated distinguishing love as though it were a fiction!

This is a grievous wounding of the Lord of love.
It pours despite upon amazing mercy.
It exposes the questioner to fearful peril.

III. GOD'S LOVE CONSIDERED.

When we solemnly turn, and meditate upon these things, we see—

1. Love lamenting. Is God to be thus treated? Shall he mournfully cry, "I have loved you. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?"
2. Love entreating. Does not each accent say, "Return to me?"
3. Love abounding. Our question shames us. God loves us in ten thousand ways; loves us so as to be patient even when we wickedly question his love.
4. Love conquering. We bow at Jehovah's feet with shame, and yield our heart's best love in return for his love.

Come, ye cast-down ones, leave your sullen questionings!

Run into his arms, and receive the *quietus* of all your fears.

Love-notes.

A child has wilfully disobeyed. For this offence he has been chastised, and confined to his own room. He is very sullen and obstinate, and his father reasons with him, and tells him with tears that he is greatly grieved with him, and feels wounded by the ingratitude which he receives after all his love. The boy angrily replies that he does not believe in his father's love: if he loved him, why did he whip him, and send him to bed? This would be a very rebellious speech; but it would be pitched in the same key as our text. It would also set forth the spirit which is often seen in Christians when they measure the Lord's love by their temporal circumstances, and ask in rebellion whether their poverty, their pains, and their persecutions are fit fruits of divine favor. The Lord knows how foolish we are apt to be when our soul is vexed with bitter anguish, and therefore he does not destroy us for our presumption, but he patiently reasons with us that he may bring us to a better mind.

If it would be marvellous to see one river leap up from the earth full-grown, what would it be to gaze upon a vast spring from which all the rivers of the

earth should at once come bubbling up, a thousand of them born at a birth? What a vision would it be! Who can conceive it? And yet the love of God is that fountain, from which all the rivers of mercy, which have ever gladdened our race—all the rivers of grace in time, and of glory hereafter—take their rise. My soul, stand thou at that sacred fountain-head, and adore and magnify for ever and ever God, even our Father, who hath loved us.—*C. H. S.*

What is more tender than a mother's love
To the sweet infant fondling in her arms?
What arguments need her compassion move
To hear its cries, and help it in its harms?
Now, if the tenderest mother were possessed
Of all the love within her single breast
Of all the mothers since the world began,
'Tis nothing to the love of God to man.

—*John Byrom.*

A very tender parent had a son, who, from his earliest years, proved headstrong and dissolute. Conscious of the extent of his demerits, he dreaded and hated his parent. Meanwhile, every means was used to disarm him of these suspicions, so unworthy of the tenderness and love which yearned in his father's bosom, and of all the kindness and forbearance which were lavished upon him. Eventually the means appeared to be successful, and confidence, in a great degree, took the place of his ungenerous suspicions. Entertained in the family as one who had never trespassed, he now left his home to embark in mercantile affairs and was assured that if in any

extremity he would apply to his parent, he should find his application kindly received. In the course of years it fell out that he was reduced to extremity; but, instead of communicating his case to his parent, his base suspicion and disbelief of his tenderness and care again conquered him, and he neglected to apply to him. Who can tell how deeply that father's heart was rent at such depravity of feeling? Yet this is the case of the believer, who, pardoned and accepted, yet refuses to trust his heavenly Parent, throws away his filial confidence, and with his old suspicions stands aloof in sullen distrust. Oh, how is God dishonored by this sinful unbelief!—*Salter.*

Dr. Chalmers used to say that "As soon as a man comes to understand that 'God is love,' he is infallibly converted."

CXXIX.

"BUT UNTO YOU THAT FEAR MY NAME SHALL THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARISE WITH HEALING IN HIS WINGS; AND YE SHALL GO FORTH, AND GROW UP AS CALVES OF THE STALL."—*Malachi* iv. 2.

THERE is one grand distinction among men—"him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." See last verse of previous chapter.

Fearing God is the mark which distinguishes man from man far more than wealth, rank, or nationality.

The coming of Christ is a calamity or a blessing to men according to their character.

What a change of figures! To the wicked "*an oven!*" (See verse 1.) To God-fearing men a "*Sun!*"

Our text was fulfilled at our Lord's first coming.

It awaits a far larger fulfilment at his second coming.

It is always true as a general principle, and it is felt to be true when the Lord Jesus spiritually draws near to his people.

I. LET US THINK OF OUR LORD AS THE SUN.

1. He is the centre of the whole system of grace.
2. He is to us the Grand Attraction, and Holdfast, keeping us in our places, as the sun keeps the planets in their orbits.

3. He is the source of all good. His beams are righteousness: all that emanates from him is good: all good emanates from him; even as all light and heat come, directly or indirectly, from the sun.

4. He is without variableness or shadow of turning. James i. 17. In himself he is for ever the same, shining on without ceasing.

5. To us he has his risings, and his settings. If for a while we are in the shade, let us look for his arising.

6. To those who fear him not he never rises, for they are blind, and know no day, and see no light.

What the world would be without the sun, that should we be without our Lord. Can we conceive the gloom, the death, etc.?

II. LET US ENJOY THE BLESSINGS WHICH HE SCATTERS.

1. What light of knowledge, what warmth of love, what radiance of joy we receive from him! Let us walk in it.

2. What health he gives! Healing for the sick, health for the strong.

Every sunbeam is medicinal, every word of Christ is life.

The earlier we come to Christ the better: his rising is attended with sparkling dews of joy.

The more we commune with him the better: let us bask in the sunlight.

3. What liberty he brings! "Ye shall go forth."

When the sun has reached a certain point in his annual course, the cattle which have been stalled are led forth to the mountain pastures; so the Lord Jesus sets his people free, and they go forth—

To enjoy spiritual privileges.
To perform spiritual duties.
To reach spiritual attainments.
To carry abroad spiritual influences.

4. What growth he fosters!—"and grow up as calves of the stall."

When the Lord Jesus is with his people—

They are abundantly fed.
They are comfortably housed.
They are regularly tended.
They advance rapidly to maturity.

A heart which communes with Jesus possesses a freshness of youth, an ease of life, and other advantages, which admirably fulfil the comparison of "calves of the stall."

As all this comes of fearing the Lord, let us be diligent in worship, careful in obedience, and reverent in spirit.

As all this comes through our Lord Jesus, let us abide under his sweet influences, and never move out of his sunshine into that far off country, where

the Arctic winter is never cheered by the Sun of righteousness.

We have not to make a Sun, or move the Sun, or buy the Sun; but only to step into the free and blessed sunshine. Why do we hesitate?

Why do we not by faith pass from darkness into his marvellous light?

SUNBEAMS.

The late Mr. Robinson, of Cambridge, called upon a friend just as he had received a letter from his son, who was surgeon on board a vessel then lying off Smyrna. The son mentioned to his father that every morning, about sunrise, a fresh gale of air blew from the sea across the land, and, from its wholesomeness and utility in clearing the infected air, this wind is always called *the Doctor*. "Now," says Mr. Robinson, "it strikes me that the prophet Malachi, who lived in that quarter of the world, might allude to this circumstance when he says that 'the Sun of righteousness shall arise *with healing in his wings*.' The Psalmist mentions 'the wings of the wind,' and it appears to me that this salubrious breeze, which attends the rising of the sun, may be properly enough considered as the wings of the sun, which contain such healing influences, rather than the beams of the sun, as the passage has been commonly understood." —*Burder's "Oriental Customs."*

There is a beautiful fable of the ancient mythology, to the effect that Apollo, who represents the sun,

killed a huge poisonous serpent by arrows surely aimed, and shot from afar. It intimates that sunbeams, darted straight from heaven, destroy many deadly things that crawl upon the ground, and so make the world a safer habitation. The parable is, in this respect, a stroke of truth, and it coincides with a feature of the eternal covenant. Light from the face of Jesus, when it is permitted to stream right into a human heart, destroys the noisome things that haunt it, as Apollo's arrows slew the snake.— *W. Arnot.*

In all the departments of vegetable, animal, moral, and spiritual life, light stands out as the foremost blessing and benefit which God confers. In physical existence this is especially true. Thousands die for lack of light. No vigorous vegetable life, no healthy animal life, can long exist without light. The pestilence "walketh in darkness" . . . . Sir James Wylie, late physician to the Emperor of Russia, attentively studied the effects of light as a curative agent in the hospital of St. Petersburg, and he discovered that the number of patients who were cured in rooms properly lighted was four times that of those confined in dark rooms. These different results are due to the agency of light, without a full supply of which plants and animals maintain but a sickly and feeble existence. Light is the cheapest and best of all medicines. Nervous ailments yield to the power of sunshine. Pallid faces grow fresh and ruddy beneath its glow. The sun's rays have wonderful purifying power.—*H. L. Hastings.*

"Heaven be praised! I have once more seen the sun," said Dr. Hayes, in his record of the experience of a certain Arctic day, when he, with others, had visited a point from which they could see the sun come up for the first time from his long winter isolation. "Off went our caps with simultaneous impulse, and we hailed this long-lost wanderer of the heavens with loud demonstrations of joy."

A man scoffingly asked, "What advantage has a religious man over any one like myself? Does not the sun shine on me as on him, this fine day?" "Yes," replied his companion, a pious laborer, "but the religious man has two suns shining on him at once,—one on his body, the other on his soul."—*The Biblical Treasury.*

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